5-2013

Gossip, Exclusion, Competition, and Spite: A Look Below the Glass Ceiling at Female-to-Female Communication Habits in the Workplace

Katelyn Elizabeth Brownlee
kbrownl1@utk.edu

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Katelyn Elizabeth Brownlee entitled "Gossip, Exclusion, Competition, and Spite: A Look Below the Glass Ceiling at Female-to-Female Communication Habits in the Workplace." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Communication and Information.

Michelle Violanti, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Courtney Wright, Laura Miller

Accepted for the Council:
Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

Gossip, Exclusion, Competition, and Spite: A Look Below the Glass Ceiling at Female-to-Female Communication Habits in the Workplace

A Thesis Presented for the Master of Science Degree

University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Katelyn Elizabeth Brownlee

May 2013

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my wonderful husband. Thank you for having the courage to marry

me in the middle of completing this graduate degree. You're a brave soul, Matt Abernathy.

Acknowledgements

I want to take this opportunity to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Michelle Violanti, and my thesis committee members, Dr. Laura Miller and Dr. Courtney Wright, for their guidance throughout the entirety of this process.

Abstract

The glass ceiling is defined as the impenetrable force that excludes women and minorities from informal and formal social networks that provide access to executive positions (Callahan & Tomaszewski, 2007). There are many factors that contribute to the enduring nature of the glass ceiling such as the socialization of women and/or the patriarchal nature of the workforce, but research is still lagging with respect to understanding how women impact and experience one another within the workplace and how that contributes to their overall experience and drive to progress upwardly (Callahan & Tomaszewski, 2007; Fine & Buzzanell, 2000; Kanter, 1977a). Using a grounded theory qualitative study, this research suggests that indirect social aggression is a part of the organizational experience, in particular that gossip is a cultural norm of female subgroups and that the general complacency toward indirect social aggression between women may be connected to the lack of upward progression by this group. Additionally, this research suggests that the unrealistic expectations women have regarding their office relationships with other women is connected to increased conflict and instances of indirect social aggression. This study recommends that the way to manage and focus organizational gossip is by educating managers on how to intervene in negative gossip cycles in the office and create opportunities for female employees to express their concern in arenas that do not threaten their social status. Secondly, this study also recommends that future scholars and female academics endorse the development of female-centric courses that teach women how to be successful in their careers and in managing the tensions that exist within their office relationships.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The stereotype of the corporate ladder climbing, high heel stomping, fellow woman-hating career woman is an intriguing archetype to explore. In one respect, this character possesses the skills to be able to run a major corporation, but she also draws criticism from her female peers for being too career-oriented and again from her male peers for not being feminine enough. This character is portrayed in movies as Miranda Priestly in *The Devil Wears Prada*, the ice-queen who rules the offices of a global fashion magazine, or as Dr. Baily from ABC's *Grey's Anatomy*, a woman who is labeled as "The Nazi" by her interns. These characterizations of ambitious women as curt, controlling, mean, and power-hungry showcase this lingering idea that a successful professional woman is built upon the quashed careers of her female peers. However, it's important to note that the social and professional development of this archetype is wrought with obstacles from the male-centricity of her office culture to the gossip she faces from the other women in the office (Kanter, 1977a).

In general, these restrictive factors or obstacles are described by the effect of the "glass ceiling," which is the impenetrable force that excludes women and minorities from the informal and formal social networks that provide access to executive positions (Callahan & Tomaszewski, 2007). Whether the characteristics of the above described archetype ring true or are representative of the hyperbole of television and cinema, there may be some truth in the notion that female subgroups in the workplace are wrought with relational tensions. Although there are still very few women who reside in the chief executive offices of *Forbes'* elite, everyday universities across the world are graduating more and more educated and capable young women ready to take on the challenge of organizational life (McGill, 2012). For example, at the University of Tennessee alone, increasingly more female first-year students persisted to

graduation within four years than their male counterparts from 1993-2011, which is markedly different than from 1987-1992 where male students outnumbered female students in persistence to graduation in four years (Cunningham, Randolph, & Wagoner, 2012). Moreover, at the University of Tennessee, women continue to outnumber men as graduate students in master's, doctoral, and professional programs and have done so since 1991 (Cunningham, Randolph, & Wagoner, 2012). From aerospace engineering to zoology, women are increasing both their representation across the board and also in the board room, and it's important for feminist organizational communication scholars to continue to explore how to maximize effectiveness and efficiency of an organization with increased female representation.

This research looks specifically at the dynamics among women within the office environment to explore how their relational experiences impact their ability to progress upwardly and perform in their role. Due to the limited research in the area of feminist organizational communication, this study seeks to provide recommendations to help catalyze conversations surrounding workplace culture and climate and explore how organizations can maximize the effectiveness of their female staff by being aware of the tensions that exist within the female subcultures of the office (Mumby, 1996).

Rationale

Despite the growing number of female professionals, modern statistics tell a story of sex inequality and male-dominance across all disciplines, providing agency to the purveying thought of feminist scholars that the glass ceiling exists and endures to this day (Hon, 1995). Modern research has looked at the "glass ceiling" from a variety of perspectives to identify why females are still not held to the same standards as their male counterparts (Hon, 1995). According to Mumby (1996) explanations for the continued existence of the glass ceiling include (but are not

limited to) "the hierarchal structure of organizations, gender-role spillover, the channeling of women into historically less-prestigious, lower paid occupations, and the existence of distinct masculine and feminine subcultures characterized by different practices" (p. 272). Although there is a large body of research that seeks to understand the relationship between organizational culture and sex, this research attempts to explore how women impact, perceive, and communicate with one another within the workplace as it relates to how women progress throughout an organization (Mumby, 1996). According to Mumby (1996) the apex where critical organizational communication studies and feminist theories and perspectives meet is an "underexplored domain of inquiry" (p. 254). Moreover, Mumby (1996) stated that there lies a distinct opportunity for scholars to continue to push forward the feminist organizational communication agenda. Litwin and Hallstein also discussed the "complete silence surrounding the dark side of female relationships" and challenged feminist and organizational scholars alike to shed like on this unique communication phenomenon (2007, p.113). Rising to the challenge posed by feminist scholars (Fine and Buzzanell, 2000; Litwin and Hallstein, 2007; Mumby, 1996), this research proposes recommendations about how to manage and further study the relational and communication dynamics that exist among women in the office.

As noted by Litwin & Hallstein (2007) female-female office friendships can be wrought with obstacles despite the value that women place upon their friendships. Within the workplace, these friendships are both "vital and widespread"; however, they present their own unique challenges to how women experience their workplace (Litwin & Hallstein, 2007). These challenges have the potential to seriously disrupt the effectiveness and efficiency of an office and also cause job dissatisfaction and communication breakdowns (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1987: Litwin & Hallstein, 1987).

This study defines communication and relational challenges by using indirect social aggression as the vehicle from which women compete with their peers for power and status. Indirect social aggression is defined as a form of interpersonal communication where the perpetrator uses aversive tactics such as gossip, isolation, avoidance, and exclusion to negatively impact a target's status and confidence (Anderson & Reid, 2009). As stated by Eichbaum and Orbach (1987) " behind the curtain of sisterhood lies a myriad of emotional tangles that can wreak havoc... important friendships occur at work and are subject to all the problems of adolescence" (p. 10). These problems are important to explore within a professional context as they can result in a myriad of negative consequences and are all a part of the female organizational experience (Houmanfar & Mancl, 2003).

Using research that stems from sociological, psychological, feminist, and management scholarship, this study explores the dark side of female relationships across the lifespan and uses the collected rich data to understand how those experiences impact how women communicate with and perceive one another in organizational settings. This research explores the relational dynamics within feminine workplace subcultures that shape the female organizational experience and careers.

Gossip and Social Aggression

To better understand the role women play in limiting upward progression of their peers it's important to explore the tactics and strategies used to denigrate competition. This study explores indirect social aggression as the main vehicle used when asserting dominance within female groups. According to Anderson and Reid (2009), indirect social aggression is a form of interpersonal communication that uses aversive communicative tactics such as avoidance, teasing, gossiping, and exclusion to negatively impact a target's face and self-concept. As young

children, individuals assert their aggression through physical violence as they lack the verbal skills to communicate the issue at hand; as children develop physically, emotionally, and verbally, the preferred method of abuse tends to evolve from hitting and kicking, to teasing and bullying (Catanzaro, 2011).

The primary factor that distinguishes between general aggression and indirect social aggression is the manipulation that occurs during the interaction (Coyne & Whitehead, 2008). Indirect social aggression is generally delivered under a guise with the focus being on protecting the aggressor and further alienating the victim (Coyne & Whitehead, 2008). Understandably, this type of aggression is popular within the halls of middle and high schools across the nation, especially within female social groups (Catanzaro, 2011). Ultimately, the major appeal of using indirect socially aggressive behaviors is the low-cost and high-yield gain it provides, which lends itself not only to the workplace, but also operates effectively within most female communication styles (Coyne & Whitehead, 2008). According to Rucker and Gendrin (2007), women in general tend to use a more indirect communication style compared to their male counterparts, who prefer to use direct communication styles. The tendency for women to use a more indirect communication style and to use suggestive rather than commanding communicative messaging further explains why women choose to use aggress against one another indirectly (Rucker & Gendrin, 2007).

Indirect social aggression targets an individual's "face." Face, within this context, can be defined as creation and management of the identity a person wishes to both assume and for others to accept during interactions (Willer & Cupach, 2008). Additionally, Brown and Levinson (1987) went on to state that individuals have two face needs: "the desire to be unimpeded in one's actions (negative face) and the desire to be approved of (positive face)"

(p.13). Indirect social aggression makes the most impact by contradicting the accepted norm that people will ultimately accept and support each other's identity, or the identity that is presented to them (Willer & Cupach, 2008). Actions or behaviors that act in opposition to an individual's "face" are face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Indirect socially aggressive behaviors are, in their simplest forms, face-threatening acts that start one's defensive systems such as fight or flight (Willer & Cupach, 2008).

Women, due to their strong desire to be accepted, are more susceptible than men to the ill effects of indirect social aggression including anger, hurt, embarrassment, depression, anxiety, and in the most severe instances suicidal feelings (Willer & Cupach, 2008). Although acts of violence may leave marks, modern research suggests that it is the more manipulative and strategic forms of aggression that leave the most lasting wounds and are ultimately, most effective in managing perceived competitors (Catanzaro, 2011). For example, Goffman (1967) rates indirect socially aggressive behaviors on a continuum. The first stage on the continuum is unintentionally face threatening communication (ex. a woman doesn't wave to a friend on the street because she doesn't notice her, but the friend is hurt none the less), the second is incidental (ex. a friend being overly honest in a situation where it is not appropriate) and thirdly, intentionally aggressive behavior (ex. a girl yells across the lunch room that her ex-friend is a loser and no one should sit with her). The aforementioned examples denote that the intentionality of an aggressive act only further contribute to the alienation the target feels in response to the interaction (Goffman, 1967). The relationship between the target and perpetrator, the environment, and the aggression itself, all work synchronously and make the target feel devalued, isolated, and embarrassed (Goffman, 1967).

Research Questions

Research questions within qualitative research help to guide the study and provide a framework

for exploration. The following overarching questions guide this thesis:

R1: How do women perceive and communicate with their fellow female employees?

R2: How are women influenced by female-to-female communication within the

workplace?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

As researchers and professionals alike seek to understand why women and men have such differing professional experiences, the research itself must become more specific to identify the factors at play (Hon, 1995). Throughout the literature surveyed for this study, several themes dominated the research with the key idea being that the gendered nature of organizational culture is the enduring obstacle women face within the professional world. Thinking beyond that thematic strain, this study explores the internal and inter-sex factors that negatively impact opportunities for upward progression of women, a niche piece of the glass ceiling research upon which researchers have not directly focused (Mumby, 1996). The literature review is comprised of seven sections of related research—A Brief History of Communication Study; A Look at the Evolution of Organizational Communication Research; Feminist Perspectives of Organizational Communication Research; Brief History of Women at Work; Women in Today's Workplace; Gossip, Exclusion, Competition, and Spite; and Looking Below the Glass Ceiling—to provide a substantive base from which this study can be built.

With that said, before we look forward it is important to explore the beginnings of communication study, organizational communication, feminist communication study, and women in the workplace to provide context for this multidisciplinary study.

A Brief History of Communication Study

The challenge in summarizing the history of a field like communication studies is the fact that human communication is a central social process (Rogers, 1994). Attempting to uncover the history of human communication is comparable to anthropologists studying the evolutionary path from Homo Habilis to modern society; it takes a very concerted effort to triangulate how communication study truly evolved into the discipline it is today. According to Rogers (1994)

the first communication research institute was founded by Dr. William Schramm in 1943. It brought together minds from psychology, sociology, political science, journalism, and behavioral sciences to explore this up and coming academic discipline(Rogers, 1994). Although, the study of communication in the United States has roots in Iowa in the early 1900s, the study and theoretical development of the social sciences can be traced back to 1450 in Mainz, Germany, with the re-invention of the printing press by Johann Gutenberg (Rogers, 1994). The Gutenberg Press removed the substantial communicative power of the Catholic Church and monasteries that had long controlled the power of print and production (Rogers, 1994). The wide-spread access to books, letters, scripture, and education through the innovation of the Gutenberg Press provided future social scientists such as Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud, and Karl Marx with the foundation from which to begin building this new field of academia (Rogers, 1994).

According to Rogers (1994), the migration of leading international scientists and scholars as result of the rise of Nazism greatly sped up the growth of the American marketplace of ideas. This migration allowed for the works of leading theorists such as Augustus Comte, Emile Durkheim, Gabriel Tarde, and George Simmel to stimulate the study of social sciences in America (Rogers, 1994). Within the realm of academics, particularly communication studies, this realm of growth was made possible by sizable donations from the Rockefeller Foundation (Rogers, 1994). From 1891-1955, Rogers (1994) documented thirteen unique instances where donations from the Rockefeller Foundation directly influenced the progress of communication study (Rogers, 1994). By financially supporting the likes of Harold Lasswell, Paul Lazarsfeld, Kurt Lewin, and Wilbur Schramm, the Rockefeller Foundation provided the fathers of communication studies with the means to truly carve out the field (Rogers, 1994).

The Founding Fathers of Communication Study

Although the history of the study of human communication is not as long nor as well-documented as that of its social science-based brethren, it's important to recognize that the study of human communication was not born to be its own unique research field, but more or less a place where academics of varying disciplines could bring together aspects of psychology, sociology, math, and behavioral studies to explore one or many human communication events (Rogers, 1994). The study of human communication is collaborative and open-minded by nature because of the vast academic specialties of its fore-fathers.

The multidisciplinary nature of communication studies may in fact be due to the resounding impact of Harold Lasswell. Lasswell, a political scientist by education, was a dynamic and bold researcher who led the study of propaganda and created the research method of content analysis (Rogers, 1994). Rogers (1994) redefined Lasswell's characterization of propaganda as "the management of collective attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols," (p.213). Lasswell created content analysis to infer the effects of propaganda messages by classifying content with respect to various variables (Rogers, 1994). Another major figure connected to shaping modern communication research is Paul Lazarsfeld, a mathematically minded, social psychologist, credited with initiating the media effects tradition, a dominant paradigm in U.S. mass communication research; advancing survey methodology through innovative research methods; and creating the prototype for the university-based research institute (Rogers, 1994).

It is impossible to summarize the history of human communication without discussing the vast impact made by Kurt Lewin. Lewin, a Polish born social psychologist, was exiled to the United States as Nazism spread across Europe (Rogers, 1994). This move also influenced

Lewin's academic interest (Rogers, 1994). Lewin's contribution to group communication, and more importantly organizational communication, is profoundly important to this study as Lewin's work in group dynamics created a niche that looks at how individuals operate within the workplace (Rogers, 1994). One of Lewin's most profound contributions to communication study is the role of gatekeepers. Gatekeepers are "individuals who control the flow of messages in a channel; they may withhold information, shape it, expand it, or repeat it" (Rogers, 1994, p. 335). Additionally, Lewin's commitment to understanding group dynamics created the foundation from which organizational communication scholars study and research how employees and staff interact with one another (Rogers, 1994).

Lastly, the work of Wilbur Schramm is highlighted as he developed the academic field of human communication (Rogers, 1994). Throughout his career, Schramm founded communication research institutes in Iowa, Illinois, and Stanford and institutionalized the field of communication study (Rogers, 1994). Moreover, it was Schramm's ability to connect with the great sociological minds of his era such as Kurt Lewin to develop bridges between communication studies and other academic disciplines (Rogers, 1994). Schramm published textbooks and created curricula for communication study; ultimately, his tireless efforts resulted in the widespread and international reach of communication studies as an academic field (Rogers, 1994).

A Look at the Evolution of Organizational Communication

The study of organizational communication can be traced back to the great Greek philosophers Aristotle, Plato, and Isocrates, who are often credited with first examining the power of human communication (Claire, 1999). However, it is W. Charles Redding who is credited with establishing organizational communication as a field of study within the human

communication paradigm (Claire, 1999). The Redding Tradition, Redding's legacy within the

field, believes that communication can profoundly impact workplace practices; however, it must

be understood and explored by a skeptical mind (Claire, 1999). This skepticism allows managers

"to use social scientific findings to inform changes in information flow and feedback policy"

(Buzzanell & Stohl, 1999, p. 324). Buzzanell and Stohl (1999) identified four themes in regards

to how Redding approached his research:

1. "Human progress through empirical investigations.

2. The power of critique.

3. Message exchange as the core of organizational communication.

4. The need to understand the socio-historical and diverse theoretical underpinnings of the

   field" (p. 325).

Additionally, the Redding Tradition evolved to combine formats for critique and enhancing

effectiveness using debate and logic and social scientific processes with a desire to understand

the complexities of human behavior (Buzzanell & Stohl, 1999). Using Lasswell's research

method of content analysis, Redding explored how different outcomes and processes could

benefit managers and professionals (Buzzanell & Stohl, 1999). Redding was so committed to the

power of critique he often criticized fellow communication educators for failing to challenge the

academic status quo surrounding organizational life and communication professionals for not

challenging corporate ideologies (Buzzanell & Stohl, 1999). The lack of critique of the field,

particularly in the late 70s, had Redding concerned that the field of organizational

communication research was nothing more than a collection of educated guesses and

generalizations (Buzzanell & Stohl, 1999). Despite his concern for the fate of the field,

Redding's impact on organizational communication is as profound as his work and the work of

his graduate students that focused on messages and message exchange processes, which laid the foundation for modern organizational communication study (Buzzanell & Stohl, 1999).

Using Connie Bullis's (2005) retrospective on the history of organizational communication to guide this field's brief historical overview, the 1980s and 1990s were an incredibly exciting time for organizational communication scholars. The very first organizational communication seminar, led by Phil Tompkins, lectured on considerations of both the challenge of organizational diagnoses and the importance of the rhetorical tradition (Bullis, 2005). This seminar laid the foundation for future publications to begin exploring organizational communication through the lens of unobtrusive control, interpretive and critical perspectives, and metaphorical clusters for organizations (Bullis, 2005: Putnam, 1982).

From a theoretical perspective, organizational communication was driven by effectiveness models; however, Deetz (1992) argued that a participatory model based in dialogue and mutual understanding is more beneficial to the organizational environment as it seeks to create a communication democracy between all group members. Discussions and debate surrounding organizational communication further fostered the field. As organizational theory developed throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, organizational communication publications became more and more abundant and in their abundance the need to look to outside research for supporting evidence became less and less (Bullis, 2005). At present, organizational communication represents a dynamic, multidisciplinary approach to scholarship that incorporates elements of psychology, sociology, feminist scholarship, management theory, and behavioral science (Bullis, 2005). This is reminiscent of Schramm's original intent of human communication scholarship being an academic meeting point for researchers and students alike to connect over how messages are sent and received (Rogers, 1994). Due to the multidisciplinary nature of

organizational communication, both qualitative and quantitative research paradigms are used and debated over to this day.

Feminist Perspectives of Organizational Communication

This study is built upon perspectives of feminist scholars, particularly those who study the state of organizational culture in the United States. The feminist tradition looks to explain, explore, and identify the various and unique roles women play within society (Rakow & Natasia, 2008). More specifically, feminist theory seeks to understand the nature of gender and sex inequality through various lenses by focusing on experience and social role (Rakow & Natasia, 2008). Although feminist theory is a strong area of academic research, feminist organizational communication is still in a beginning stage with few pieces of literature representing the area (Mumby, 1996).

According to Fine and Buzzanell (2000) feminist organizational theory "strives to understand how gender is constructed through discourse and practices so that traditional gender dynamics remain unchanged within contexts of messages, structures, policies, and procedures" (p. 134). From an overarching perspective, Fine and Buzzanell (2000) state that the goal of feminist organizational communication scholars is to inspire social change and create the opportunity for women to fully express their human potential within organizational settings.

As feminist organizational communication research is still growing into its academic identity the major challenge with the field is the many interpretations of how the field should be studied, advocated for, and discussed by scholars (Fine & Buzzanell, 2000). The tensions that exist within the field alone create challenges for future scholars as the identity shifts depending on the topic debated upon (Fine & Buzzanell, 2000). For example, one of the major scholarly tension's that exists within the field is whether gender or sex represents culture or whether

individuals form relationships where they replicate the societal power struggles that groups face outside of the office (Buzzanell, 2000). This very basic foundational debate has large-scale implications for the field as it brings into question the very nature of how scholars study sex, gender, and culture within an organizational setting. The point at which the majority of scholars do agree is that career advice and outlined career paths focus on the advancement of white males within one company through executive development programs and sponsorships and not on female or minority employees (Buzzanell, 2000). These paths and programs that are so directed towards one group, force competition within the female subgroups and minority subgroups increasing tension between members (Fine & Buzzanell, 2000).

For the past two decades scholars have explored organizational socialization with growing interest as it relates to the female experience within the workplace (Bullis & Rohrbauck-Stout, 2000). This growth in research is in part due to the evolving idea of the organization or workplace as having a distinct culture (Bullis & Rohrbauck-Stout, 2000). Research from the 1990s recognized that the predominant culture throughout corporate America is male dominated (Bullis & Rohrbauck-Stout, 2000). Moving into present-day, Bullis and Rohrbauck-Stout (2000) use feminist standpoint theory to explore how the organizational socialization process differs from a woman's perspective to a man's. Socialization is important to understanding the tensions that exist within the female community in a workplace as the socialization process introduces new employees to the culture of the workplace and provides opportunities for new employees to transition from outsiders to insiders (Bullis & Rohrbauck-Stout, 2000). The socialization piece as discussed by Bullis and Rorhbauck-Stout (2000) is a key theme of how evolutionary mechanisms present themselves in the workplace and how that relates to the ways in which women communicate with their fellow female coworkers.

Women in Today's Workplace

According to a study of 100 upper-management executives, the path women take from the beginning of their career to retirement is marked by completely different experiences than those of their male counterparts (Lyness & Thompson, 2000). So different are these experiences that the strategies employed for advancement are markedly dissimilar (Lyness & Thompson, 2000). These differing strategies have been subject to much debate since the early 1980s, when researchers started to critically explore the differences between male and female organizational communication and management styles (Lyness & Thompson, 2000). According to Morley and Shockley-Zalabak (1985), female employees and managers differ from their male peers in two ways in regards to organizational communication styles: women are more open, accessible, and relationship-based with their peers and more likely to share regulative and informative messages with both their peers and superiors. Moreover, since female employees are more likely to operate within a feedback cycle, the relationship between female superiors and their subordinates is more fluid than that of a male superior and his subordinates, meaning that male managers receive less feedback relating to performance than a female would in a similar position (Morley, & Shockley-Zalabak, 1985).

The enduring stereotypes of male versus female communication styles have greatly influenced the validity of organizational communication research (Wilkins & Andersen, 1991). These stereotypes are the foundation for the rhetoric that implies that women are less qualified for managerial positions because they lack the inherent organizational communication skills to be successful (Wilkins & Andersen, 1991). Although sex differences in communication behaviors exist, there is little to no data that suggest there are organizational communication sex differences in managers (Wilkins & Andersen, 1991). Additionally, the researchers go on to

state that in the outside world there may be varied sex differences in communication patterns due to the patriarchal nature of organizations because women learn to adapt to these masculine standard styles (Wilkins & Andersen, 1991).

The relationship between female coworkers within the office environment is a burgeoning realm of study which seeks to understand the complexities of women trying to succeed in traditionally male-dominated areas of the workforce. Scholars throughout different fields of study such as women's studies, communication studies, business administration, and psychology have explored and suggested how to counteract the various obstacles women and minorities face within corporate America (Crothers, Lipinski, & Minotulo, 2009; Hafen, 2009; Litwin & Hallstein, 2007; Harvey et. al.,2006; Hon, 1995; Kanter, 1977). Ultimately, current research suggests that many of the obstacles women face may be related to how females communicate with one another within a competitive work environment (Litwin & Hallstein, 2007). According to Eichenbaum and Orbach (1987), relationships that women build within a work environment are at times deeply confusing as office friendships abide by differing codes of behavior. Eichenbaum and Orbach (1987) go one to state that "close friendships, work collaborations and entire organizations can be disrupted by the dynamics between women" (p.22). Within the office environment, research suggests that women may engage in aversive behaviors to assert dominance over other female workers; these behaviors may arise particularly within female-dominant organizations that adopt a patriarchal organizational structure that devalues unique feminine skill-sets and may cause decreases in organizational effectiveness and efficiency (Litwin & Hallstein, 2007).

According to Litwin and Hallstein (2007) the notion that correcting relationally aggressive acts between women in the workplace lies solely with the women involved is false

because it assumes women have acquired negotiation skills that often are associated with male

skill-sets (Litwin & Hallstein, 2007). As Hon (1995) noted, there is a distinct lack of education

targeted towards providing women with skills, such as negotiation, that are attributed to male

skillsets. Additionally, not only are interpersonal conflicts between women in the office

prevalent, but also the detrimental effects of these negative interactions ultimately, both

consciously and subconsciously, impact a woman's ability to perform her job (Litwin &

Hallstein, 2007). Traditionally, women value equity, honesty, and interconnectedness in their

relationships both inside and outside of the workplace; when a fellow female coworker breaks a

woman's trust, the effects are comparable to when trust is broken within a true friendship (Litwin

& Hallstein, 2007; Rakow, 1989). Ultimately, women expect fellow women to "act like a female

friend" in all office situations. When the feminine friendship rules expectation are violated,

women can feel hurt, betrayed, embarrassed, disappointed, and angry (Litwin & Hallstein, 2007).

Research that explores adolescent female social aggression, as exampled in films such as

Mean Girls, notes that there are major similarities between the indirect socially aggressive acts

that occur in adolescence and the indirectly aggressive acts that occur between women within

feminine subcultures in the office (Litwin & Hallstein, 2007). The main similarities are the use

of manipulation in order to establish a social structure within a small group (Catanzaro, 2011;

Litwin & Hallstein, 2007). Just as Catanzaro (2011) describes in her study of indirect social

aggression in adolescent females, Litwin and Hallstein (2007) also reported that the interviewed

women also felt that they had had peers who "purposely engaged in hurtful or damaging

behavior against them, while simultaneously denying or keeping hidden that behavior" within

their workplace (p.119). Moreover, Litwin and Hallstein (2007) suggest that the dark side of

female interpersonal relationships within the office is sometimes hard to define or identify

because unlike the behaviors of adolescent females the indirect social aggression and subversion are practically invisible (Catanzaro, 2011). Ultimately, the manipulative and strategic nature of indirect social aggression in the workplace only furthers the stereotype of women as untrustworthy and fosters a tense relational culture of women who work together making moving forward in one's career an even greater challenge (Litwin & Hallstein, 2007).

Gossip, Exclusion, Competition, and Spite

The bullying spectrum has evolved since its inception in communication research in 1970 (Crothers, Lipinski & Minutolo, 2009). Olweus (1993) initially described bullying as "mobbing" and defined it as " a purposeful attempt to injure or inflict discomfort upon another either through words, physical contact, gestures, or exclusion from a group or peers over time" (Crothers, Lipinski & Minutolo, 2009, p. 98). Olweus's (1993) original definition speaks to the power of intent to isolate and exclude in socially aggressive messages. Throughout the literature and the multiple definitions of what constitutes bullying these themes are consistent throughout all forms of bullying such as, direct physical bullying, direct verbal bullying, and relational or indirect social aggression (Crothers, Lipinski, & Minutolo, 2009). Additionally, according to modern management research, Harvey, Heames, Richey, & Leonard (2006) added scape-goating, sexual harassment, increasing work/pressure or load, and the destabilization of the workplace, which includes failure to give credit, and setting individuals up for failure, to the original list of types of bullying, these additions all reflect intention to isolate the target as the outcome of the bullying or aggressive act. By using indirect socially aggressive tactics to isolate an individual from social support communities within the workplace the perpetrator denies the target mentorship opportunities that are integral to the process of being promoted within a company.

Inside and outside of the workplace, indirect social aggression manifests both in female and male social groups; however, the effects prove to have far more dire consequences within female social groups (Bjorkvist, Osterman, & Kaukiainen, 1992). According to Coyne and Whitehead (2008), relationships, especially close relationships, are more important to women. Therefore, within the nature of female relationships there lies the potential to emotionally hurt, maim, or scar someone using words alone. In the early stages of aggression research, indirect social aggression was defined as non-verbal communicative behaviors such as avoidance and exclusion during interactions (Feshback, 1969). This limited scope has expanded three-fold to include behaviors such as gossip, rumor-spreading, social isolation, exclusion, and alienation.

This increase in research regarding indirect social aggression comes as a result of a direct increase in mediated and celebrated image of the "mean girl" across television, movies, and the internet (Meyer, Stern, & Waldron, 2008). According to Meyer, Stern, & Waldron (2008) the increase of these mediated images of "mean girls" is directly related to the increase of actual events of indirect social aggression in young women. The idea of being a mean, manipulative, and calculating young woman extends beyond any evolutionary need to compete for male attention and appears to be transitioning into a cultural norm of young women today. According to Willer and Koenig-Kellas (2009), the aforementioned strategies to denigrate competition extend beyond the teenage experience and, within the past decade, researchers have explored the prevalence and impact of indirect social aggression in sororities and female-groups in universities with the results mirroring that of studies conducted on younger women. Whether a female is 12 or 25, research suggests that indirect social aggression is associated with "less life satisfaction, more antisocial behavior, affective instability, affective features of depression, peer

rejection, negative relationships, stimulus seeking, egocentricity, self-harm behavior, and disordered eating patterns" (Willer & Koenig-Kellas, 2009, p. 5).

When examining female perpetrators of workplace bullying, the research suggests that aggressors generally target those who don't meet societal norms (Catanzaro, 2011). Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977) identified four types or common perceptions of women: the seductress or sex object, the mother, the pet, and the iron maiden. These four iterations of the female norm are represented in television, throughout the pages of magazines, and across the internet and their prevalence in society have create four neat and tidy boxes in which to place women. When women do not meet the criteria of those types, they intentionally or unintentionally become a target of "the herd" (Catanzaro, 2011). "Girls who are intellectually different or who question feminine ideals by their appearance and dress are considered not normal" stated Catanzaro (2011), "[because] these girls remind other girls of their potential failure to match up and are considered threats to their peers" (p. 87).

According to Hickman (2006), victims of indirect social aggression in the workplace are more likely to experience increased depressive effects, lower self-esteem, increased physical complaints, and greater alcohol usage. Hickman (2006) also noted that on a smaller scale, victims of relational aggression were found to have distressed supervisor relations, decreased job satisfaction, increased job stress, less adaptive responses to problems, greater emotional disturbances, and increased organizational aggression. What is most alarming about the prevalence of these behaviors is that according to Crothers, Lipinski, and Minotulo (2009), relationally aggressive behaviors are most likely to be used by women in response to a colleague's attempt to negotiate for a better salary and benefits. Additionally, this ostracism in the light of upward progression by female colleagues often results in the victim being

unsuccessful in her negotiation and leads to lasting dissatisfaction in the workplace (Crothers, Linpinski, & Minotulo 2009).

Through an evolutionary perspective it can be surmised that women, due to an innate desire to protect their reproductive organs, often choose to use indirect social aggression as a way to assert dominance and manage perceived competitors (Marmefelt, 2009). Within the workplace, scholars have denoted several strategies women use to denigrate their competition: gossip, social exclusion, social isolation, social alienation, partner-stealing (both romantic and platonic), and rumor-spreading (Crothers, Lipinski, & Minutolo, 2009).

Several studies suggest that women make up the majority of the aggressive behavior with as many as 48 percent of office perpetrators being women (Crothers, Lipinski, & Minutolo, 2009). According to the U.S. Workplace Bullying Institute 's 2010 *Workplace Bullying Survey* that randomly surveyed more than 6,000 American workers, female perpetrators target their female co-workers 80 percent of the time; ultimately, the survey indicated that 68 percent of all workplace bullying incidents (both male and female) is same-sex harassment (Crothers, Lipinski, & Minutolo, 2009). The *2010 Workplace Bullying Survey* states that although men are more likely to bully within the workplace, women are more likely to target their female peers. Additionally, although both men and women can perpetrate against their co-workers, the type of bullying employed by women tends to be substantially different than the peer harassment traditionally used by their male peers (Crothers, Lipinski, & Minutolo, 2009). According to Crothers, Lipinski, and Minutolo (2009) studies have suggested that "women can be just as aggressive as are males; however, females demonstrate their need for superiority, control, and power differently through … relational aggression" (p.102). Harvey, et.al., (2006) indicate that bullying within the workplace has a similarly detrimental effect on an individual's identity, sense

of self worth, and personal attributes as it does on adolescents. In the workplace, the effects of

bullying also impact daily operations of a business. Workplace bullying may manifest as

reduced flexibility, increased absences, difficulty implementing organizational change, and lack

of organizational commitment, which within the workplace dynamic, mimic research conducted

with young women and the impact of relational aggression in social circles (Crothers, Lipinski &

Minutolo, 2009).

   Gossip, a tool to bind and a weapon to break. Gossip is dynamic, hard to define, hard

to predict the outcome of, and even harder to influence (Houmanfar & Johnson, 2003). Often

operating within a similar framework, or as an accomplice to rumor-spreading, gossip is the

informal communication of an anecdote to another (Houmanfar & Johnson, 2003). Gossip

originally comes from the Old English work "god-sibbs", referring to godparents identifying the

religion of their godchild (Houmanfar & Johnson, 2003). Gossip eventually evolved into its

contemporary meaning, which refers to "idle talk" (Houmanfar & Johnson, 2003). Perceived as

predominantly negative for centuries, anthropologists and sociologists now speak to "the

importance of gossip of a cultural phenomenon" (Houmanfar & Johnson, 2003, p. 119).

Anthropologically speaking, the main function of gossip is to identify those who are insiders

versus those who are outsiders, this behavior is universally accepted and actioned (Houmanfar &

Johnson, 2003). From a social psychological perspective, gossip provides individuals with

status, intimacy, information, and entertainment and provides opportunities for individuals to

compare experiences, feelings, and beliefs (Houmanfar & Johnson, 2003).

  Gossip can be subdivided into three categories: information, influence, and intimacy

(Rosnow, 2001).   As it relates to relational aggression and more importantly, organizational

communication, the second function, that of influence, relates to the use of gossip as a control

mechanism (Rosnow, 2011). This assertion of control indicates that the gossiper indirectly

creates rules about how individuals behave in certain situations and implies a direct consequence

for breaking said rules (Houmanfar & Johnson, 2003). Moving back to the relationship between

gossip and evolutionary functions, Kantor (1977) recognized that although cultural practices may

shift from mere survival mechanisms, these practices evolve and prevail in new forms. As noted

by Houmanfar & Johnson (2003), gossip is merely a learned interaction habit evolved from

institutionalized stimuli and then shared within groups. More interestingly, due to the

overarching prevalence of gossip and rumor across culture, both interaction habits are almost

immune from social extinction (Houmanfar & Johnson, 2003). Ultimately, although gossip is

dynamic in nature, it's existence may in fact be detrimental to an organization once it has

fulfilled its basic purpose of establishing social norms, spreading information, and managing

relationships (Houmanfar & Johnson, 2003).

Gossip evolved through the need to respond to the pressure of cultivating and managing

interpersonal relationships as social groups grew and diversified (Dunbar, 2004). Gossip and

rumor-spreading are two of the most common socially indirect aggressive behaviors individuals

employ to intentionally manipulate and inflict emotional pain on a target (Crothers, Lipinski&

Minutolo, 2009). According to Meyer, Stern, and Waldron (2008) gossip and rumor-spreading

are so effective at changing the behavior of a target because of the exclusive, out-group status of

the target once the gossip begins. Through gossip, the perpetrator ultimately accomplishes three

goals: isolating the victim, reinforcing relationships with peers, and giving the perpetrator an

opportunity to measure her worth in comparison to others (Meyer, Stern, & Waldron 2008).

Gossip is significantly related to interpersonal social control and the regulation of group norms;

individuals actively work to conform to citizenship norms rather than become a target of

organizational gossip or rumor, therefore creating an atmosphere that punishes those who are outside of the in-group (Hafen, 2009).

What drives indirect social aggression between women? Modern feminist communication scholars Litwin and Hallstein (2007) state that "the underbelly of women's relationships is directly tied to the material and structural constraints that continue to impact women's lives in organizations" (p.127). Both scholars go on to suggest that the tradition of male dominance in business continues to oppress women within the office and forces women to suppress their natural strengths and this "internalized oppression" manifests as indirect social aggression between female co-workers (Litwin & Hallstein, 2007). By forcing women to fit into the organizational patriarchal fold, women feel forced to "compete for resources and for acceptance in the dominant group" (Litwin & Hallstein, 2007, p.127).

To understand the complexities of indirect social aggression, it is important to understand the innate and cognitive processes taking place during aggressive episodes. Evolutionary theory posits that individuals are naturally inclined to compete for resources, which include displaying both direct and indirect aggressive behavior to denigrate the competition for resources (Koener & Floyd, 2009). This inherent inclination, best explained by Charles Darwin, asserts that the behavior and actions of individuals are all motivated by a need to pass forward one's genetic material (Koener & Floyd, 2009). One of the major facets of evolutionary theory is the role of evolved psychological mechanisms (EPMs) in cognitive and genetic adaptation (Koener & Floyd, 2008). EPMs are genetically based and used to understand and explain the cognitive adaptations that guide humanity's innate need for survival (Koener & Floyd, 2008). According to Koener & Floyd (2008) evolved psychological mechanisms or EPMs state that intra-sex competition is a valuable function of the human race that ensures genetic survival and allows for

reproduction to take place in an efficient and reliable manner. This drive to ensure successful

reproduction by acquiring a mate manifests in two ways: the need to self-promote and the desire

to socially denigrate perceived reproductive competition within social groups (Frisby et. al.,

2009). According to Anderson and Reid (2009), women compete with the same vigor as men do

when competing for resources; however women use indirect messages as opposed to direct

message to protect the perpetrators while further isolating the target. According to modern

bullying research this use of communicative manipulation is consistent with trends in

organizational bullying in women, who choose to commit aggression under a guise to ensure the

distinct isolation of the target, which ultimately negatively impacts the targets ability to do their

job (Catanzaro, 2011; Crothers, Lipinski, & Minutolo, 2009).

Evolutionary theory provides the framework for understanding the state of relational

aggression in the workplace by suggesting that within environments where the need to survive is

elevated women employ certain behaviors intended to denigrate competition and promote

themselves. For the purpose of this study, the research will explore how the inherent and innate

need to compete extends beyond mate selection and explore whether the same tactics used to

compete for a mate are also used when competing for a job or a promotion.

Tall poppy syndrome. Research has also looked at envy and competition between

women through the framework of the "tall poppy" phenomenon. Tall Poppy Syndrome (TPS) is

an Australian cultural expression, which has been borrowed by academics to describe a "disease

that feeds on the belief that anyone who appears to represent success, high ability, or admirable

qualities must be attacked, demeaned, and cut down to the common level" (Mancl & Penington,

2011, p. 79). This phenomenon seeks to explain why certain women may choose to denigrate

individuals who seemingly possess traits which "set them apart from the crowd". Additionally,

this phenomenon also suggests that women, recognizing the possibility to be bullied into the norm, may choose to "act small" in order to avoid being excluded from the workplace social elite (Mancl & Penington, 2011). Assuming women are in fact "playing small" to avoid bullying, exclusion, or abuse, Tall Poppy Syndrome provides an alternate, yet similar explanation for how women contribute to their own lack of upward progress (Mancl & Penington, 2011).

The key behavioral process that TPS explores is the area in which envy and competition collide. Additionally, Mancl and Penington (2011) state envious individuals may choose to use "predatory tactics to professionally ambush" (p. 80) successful female coworkers.

Feminist literature goes on to provide support for the possibility that indirect social aggression directly impacts the upward progression of women by asserting that when a woman appears to be ambitious or on the promotion track, it can be viewed by fellow female coworkers as "breaking rank" or increasing the expectations of her fellow coworkers (Mancl & Penington, 2011). Recognizing the possible office-wide impact this "high achieving" female may have on the collective female population it becomes the onus of the "herd" to bring said female back into the fold (Mancl & Penington, 2011).

Looking Below the Glass Ceiling

In a U.S. Department of Labor (1991) study, they defined the glass ceiling as "those artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization into management-level positions" (p.1). According to Wrigley (2002), since the 1991 release of the "Glass Ceiling Initiative," little has changed. Despite representing almost half of the workforce (44 percent), the average woman makes approximately 27 percent less than her male counterparts per year do (McGill, 2012). Ultimately, the upper echelons of business are controlled by "the old boys club", an impenetrable

group of wealthy upper-class men who promote from within, which in turn stifles the upward progression of women and minorities (Wrigley, 2002). In addition to the enduring nature of this sex wage and opportunity gap, current media continues to paint prospects for future female industry leaders as bright (Wrigley, 2002). This positive outlook ultimately detracts from the real issue at hand, despite the fact that more and more women are entering the workforce, organizational sex and minority equality is moving very slowly (Wrigley, 2002).

Research has identified the following limits to upward progression: the patriarchal nature of today's business and corporate climate, the denial of the glass ceiling phenomenon, traditional gender role socialization, and a lack of woman-to-woman mentorship and support communities (Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Hon,1995; Wrigley, 2002). These limits have transcended efforts by professional women's organizations to create organizational environments that celebrate the unique characteristics female professionals bring to the workplace. These limits inhibit female professionals from progressing towards positions in upper management and despite extensive research conducted on why the aforementioned barrier has been so long-standing, statistics show that change is coming very slowly (McGill, 2012; Wrigley, 2002). Scholars point to a variety of reasons why this phenomenon is enduring, one being the prevalence of the "the old boys club," the term used to describe the collective male dominance that leads to the isolation of women from upper management circles is still the dominant perspective in business (Hon, 1995). According to Rakow (1989), American corporate culture presently celebrates traditional male traits and values such as aggressiveness, dominance, and strength. As female traditional characteristics and values are most commonly related to maternity the stereotype that transcends into the professional world is that women are too nurturing, too emotion, and too relationship-

focused to be successful managers and executives therefore male success is based on values

contrary to those women possess naturally (Kanter, 1977).

Moreover, the enduring nature of the glass ceiling is also related to the denial of its

existence by both men and women (Wrigley, 2002). A study of 27 professional women found

that more often than not women denied the existence of the glass ceiling by personally accepting

blame for not advancing (Wrigley, 2002). Additionally, blame was passed from one's own

inadequacies in their role to the fact that because the work force is becoming more feminized

wage and opportunity equality must be moving forward as well (Wrigley, 2002). Both of these

common responses reflect a generation of women taught to accept responsibility for external

factors beyond their control.

Scholars have long explored the contradictions that exist between the feminization of

workforce and the enduring the "glass ceiling" (Aldoory & Toth, 2002). Toth and Aldoory

(2002) have broken down the major obstacles faced by women in the workforce into three

categories: hiring, salary, and opportunities promotion. The perception of equity in hiring

practices has shifted considerably over the past two decades with the affirmative action

movement and the subsequent feminization of the workforce. In a study entitled Beyond the

Velvet Ghetto (Cline et.al., 1986) researchers noted that sex equity within highly feminized

fields such as public relations and communications could only be achieved through the efforts of

individual women (Toth, 1989: Hon, 1995). This statement alone has caused dissension among

academics and in Toth and Cline's (1989) critique of the original velvet ghetto study, Toth noted

that the study was in fact very limited in scope. Modern scholars argue for a more radical

approach to gender equity, recognizing that the onus can no longer be placed on the shoulders of

female professionals themselves (Rakow & Natasia, 2008). The enduring nature of sex inequity points to a far more social and systemic issue.

In addition to salary-based inequalities, opportunities for promotion continue to factor into the organizational limitations that women face. This enduring gender and sex barrier inhibits women from progressing towards positions in upper management despite the extensive research conducted on why the aforementioned barrier has been so long-standing (Wrigley, 2002). Academics point to a variety of reasons why this phenomenon is enduring one being the prevalence of the "good-old-boy" network. This cultural touchstone celebrates the maleness of the workplace, by fostering social circles where relationships are built both in the boardroom and on the golf course (Hon, 1995). From a radical feminist perspective, Toth (1989) suggested that the onus of advancement should be the responsibility of all stakeholders involved and it is the onus of both corporations and governments alike to recognize the flaw in the institutional and social ideologies surrounding the role women play in business (Rakow & Natasia, 2008). Ultimately, the basis of this argument is that it's important for all entities involved to expel the myth that "men make better managers" and that women are "too emotional to make the decisions necessary to be an excellent manager" (Toth, 1989).

Another perspective provided by Linda Hon (1995), states that the problem of glass ceiling is in part due to the socialization of women in western society. Cognitively, when women are raised with traditional gender roles, women are at a natural disadvantage as they are less inclined to argue for their own worth (Hon, 1995). Modern university curriculums choose not to differentiate between gender and sex needs and therefore skills such as strategic management, salary negotiation, and critical thinking, common in business school curriculums are not focused upon (Hon, 1995). These disadvantages alongside the inherent "maleness" of the

professional world compromise the opportunity for women to move into upper management and executive positions.

Finally, the present state of the marketplace has influenced upward progression of women because of downsizing due to economic hardship brought forth by the global recession (Hon, 1995). Downsizing means for fewer jobs and lower salaries for both men and women (Hon, 1995).

According to Kyness and Thompson (2000) women specifically report that the exclusion from informal networks experienced distinctly by females in elite corporate positions directly impacts a woman's ability to perform in their role. According to Kanter's (1977) original tokenism theory women who work in predominantly male-dominated organizational cultures, women face obstacles that their male counterparts do not. Additionally, this theory states that women may possibly face six negative consequences that impede their ability to be promoted (Kanter, 1977: Lyness & Thompson, 2000).

The six consequences are as follows:

1. Women are more likely to feel as if they do not fit into the male dominated culture that exists in upper management circles and also feel that they need to change in some way to fit within the culture in order to be successful. (Kanter, 1977; Lyness & Thompson, 2000)

2. Kanter (1977) states that in work groups with skewed gender rations, men tend to exaggerate gender differences by emphasizing male camaraderie and excluding women from informal interactions. (Kanter, 1977; Lyness & Thompson, 2000)

   i. Additionally, "62 percent of female respondents in senior management positions reported that the "old boys" network

>perpetuates gender bias against women." (Swiss, 1996: Lyness & Thompson, 2000)

3. A third consequence of token status is that women ultimately receive less mentoring (or less effective mentoring) than male executives. (Kanter, 1977; Lyness & Thompson, 2000)

4. Women are dependent on male executives for formal organizational career management processes. Additionally, women's dependence on formal organizational processes for advancement hampers opportunities for advancement, whereas their male counterparts use more informal networks to solidify promotions. (Kanter, 1977; Lyness & Thompson, 2000)

5. Women are more likely to be viewed stereotypically, which makes it increasingly difficult for women to garner critical developmental assignments needed for advancement. (Kanter, 1977; Lyness & Thompson, 2000)

6. Finally, because women may be viewed stereotypically they may have difficulty obtaining opportunities for geographic mobility. Ultimately, women are less likely to be chosen for overseas assignments. (Kanter, 1977; Lyness & Thompson, 2000)

The negative consequences mentioned above have transcended the times and although Kanter's (1977) tokenism research is close to three decades old these consequences still apply within contemporary corporate culture.

Fostering sisterhood. Kanter (1977) first noted the importance of mentorship for women looking to climb the corporate ladder more than three decades ago. In 2013, the need for mentorship between female professionals is as important as ever and it should be considered as a

key strategy to breaking through the glass ceiling. Mentors are defined as "higher ranking, influential, senior organizational members with advanced experience and knowledge who are committed to providing upward mobility and support to a protégé's professional career" (Ragins, 1989, p.2). Mentoring relationships are significant in one's career development, success, and satisfaction and according to Ragins (1989) mentoring relationships are directly related to one's opportunities for advancement.

Research on the impact of female-to-female mentoring relationships indicates that women who develop and foster mentoring relationships fare better within male-dominated organizational cultures than those who do not (Ragins, 1989). In a longitudinal study of 199 female managers with AT&T, female protégées indicate mentors assisted with promotions, career-planning, education and provided protégées with advice, feedback, direction, and support (Ragins, 1989). Additionally, mentors, particularly white powerful male executives, give legitimacy and agency to female professionals and through that relationship the stereotypes can be broken down and a new light may be shed on the female protégée (Ragins, 1989). Through strategic advice and showing their protégée the "in's and out's" of corporate politics as well as providing instrumental feedback regarding the protégées management style, mentors help their protégées move through the corporate world with expediency (Ragins, 1989).

In a study conducted by Reich (1989), female executives were more likely to report positive benefits from mentoring relationships such as increases "in self-confidence, useful career advice, counseling on company politics and feedback on weaknesses" (p. 5). Moreover, what makes mentorship a key strategy to breaking through the glass ceiling is that despite research positing the positive impact of increased female-to-female mentorship, research also

suggests that women do not engage in these networks with other women (Callahan & Tomaszewski, 2007).

The present research suggests that there is a gap in communication between female professionals. On one hand, there is a distinct need for women to assemble to support one another, share information and knowledge, and provide guidance to young female professionals. However, the wage gap and few perceived opportunities for women within an organizational environment create an air of competition that permeates the office environment making this assembly near impossible. To better understand the factors at play, this study asks professional women to describe their relationships with fellow female employees to help identify what makes developing "a good old girls club" so hard to do.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The feminist theoretical and organizational communication disciplines both use qualitative data analysis to seek answers in a holistic way. Following a similar methodology to Hon's (1995) landmark study, this study used a long-interview process for gathering data, which was framed by grounded theory. Grounded theory challenges researchers to distance themselves from theoretical biases and then "rely on field observations to find categories that show uniformity in the data" (Reinard, 2008, p. 280). The long interviews were collected and then coded into metathemes and subthemes to help provide context for the results.

The long interview is important because it "go[es] beyond studying individual perceptions and feelings" and allows the researcher to be flexible in their role as observer and ask questions that reflect the experiences of the participant (Hon, 1995, p. 39). Most importantly, the use of the long interview gives all participants the opportunity to share their experiences in their own words. Recognizing that this method of data collection is less rigid than others, questions were developed with the intention of framing or guiding the conversation. The questions were not used exclusively, and, in some cases, were used only as touch points throughout the conversation. This allowed for fluid conversation and the opportunity for participants to lead the interview.

Description of Sample and Procedure

A snowball sample was used to obtain 11 participants for 11 interviews. The age range was from 22 to 54, with the mean being the age of 40. Participants came from health, business, communication, education, public administration, information technology, and sales. The average years of lifetime worked per individual was 17 and the average size of organization or company was 3,000 employees. The participants were found by accessing a variety of networks

and relying on ideal candidates to nominate additional candidates who have more than five years of work experience and have dynamic experiences working in offices with women. The limiting factors of this study were few as all female voices (over the age of 18 and with more than 5 years of work experience) could contribute to this study. In addition to age and experience, the only other limiting factor was that potential participants who worked in occupations with isolated work environments, such as individuals who work from home or who work in sales independently, were not asked to participate.

The intention of this study was to gather rich data that would provide the researcher with depth and an authentic account of each participant's experiences. According to Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), during a theoretical overview of qualitative search participant guidelines, only seven studies appeared to offer any general numerical guidelines which ranged from 5 to 36 participants being needed for a phenomenological study and 35 participants for ethnographical, grounded theory or ethnoscience studies. Using Guest, Bunce, and Johnson's (2006) suggestions that data saturation occurs as early as within six interviews with the development of metathemes and optimally at 12, this study aimed to gather enough participants to land comfortably within the suggested range. Considering that this study is homogenous in nature, Kuzel (1992) as quoted by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), stated that six to eight interviews are necessary for data saturation. To fulfill this recommendation, initially 10 interviews were conducted and then after stage one of data analysis and constant comparative analysis was conducted, one final interview was added to ensure that the data collected were credible and negative analysis could effectively take place.

Participant Recruitment and Interview Process

Participants were recruited through a variety of means stemming from a snowball sample. The first participant was found and vetted through the principle researcher's professional network. In the beginning, five ideal participants were identified. They were chosen based on their total experience, field of work, size of organization worked for, proximity to the principle researcher, and breadth and depth of their overall experience. The five initial participants represented the fields of education, business, health, arts, and communication. The initial participants recommended additional participants with similar, but not identical career experiences. The in-person interviews were conducted in locations agreed upon by both the interviewer and interviewee, which allowed for natural conversations to take place. An informed consent was signed prior to any conversation taking place and was collected by the researcher.

Recommended participants who did not reside within the Knoxville area had the option of conducting a phone interview or filling out an online open-ended survey. Four interviews were conducted in person and seven participants chose the online qualitative survey. The online survey was created from the original interview guide, which was compiled at the beginning of the research. Prior to participating in the study, all participants who completed an online interview were asked to initial an informed consent form. The online participants were asked about their office environment, their experiences with friendships in the office, their experiences facing or witnessing indirect social aggression, and their perception of ambitious women. The online interview was facilitated through Google Docs and then imported to a larger excel file where each participant received a unique identifier, which was coded by the principle researcher.

The questions developed to guide the interviews were created using similar qualitative studies from the feminist organizational communication discipline (Hon, 1995; Litwin &

Hallstein, 2007). The identification section was crafted to ascertain from all participants their age, the sector in which they work, and the size of the organization where they work. These data were important as the dynamics and relationships that exist within smaller organizations may differ from those of larger organizations. Additionally, to ensure that a credible sample was used, age was an important demographic to collect.

The questions that followed the identification section depended on the individual's own experiences and willingness to share her story. The guiding research questions created were used to explore how women perceive and communicate with their female coworkers and how those interactions and conversations impact their overall ability to progress upward within the organization. Participants were asked about their experiences interacting with female coworkers both formally and informally and were asked to be detailed and share their examples. Participants were also asked about instances of conflict between women and instances where they witnessed a relationally aggressive act taking place in their workplace.

Due to the nature of a grounded theory qualitative study, the interviews themselves were opportunities for observation and natural conversation to develop; therefore, although an interview guide was developed, in some instances questions were created spontaneously to complement the participant's experiences.

The Participants: An Introduction

Eleven participants were recruited for the purpose of the study with ages ranging from 22 to 54. Below is a listing of each participant. All names have been changed to protect the identity and confidentiality of each participant. This pseudonym is used throughout the remainder of this study to identify the conversations and quotations of each participant.

1. Allison is an administrative assistant for a sound and lighting company. The company she works for is very busy, even though it boasts a small staff. The company is family-owned and operated. She works primarily in the showroom welcoming guests and clients and managing the administration of the company. She is in her early thirties and overall has 14 years of work experience. Alison is from Ottawa, Ontario.

2. Brenda is a partner in an investment firm. She is in her mid-to-late 20s. She works in a small office of six people in Denver, Colorado. The environment is usually casual and quiet.

3. Carolyn is an assistant store manager for a major retail chain in Ottawa, Ontario. She is in her late 20s. Her office environment is busy and comfortable. Her staff wears athletic gear and is encouraged to give each other in the moment feedback on their performance.

4. Diane is 28-years-old and is a drama and humanities teacher presently living and working in Bangladesh, but originally from London, Ontario. The dress code at the school where she teachers is professional and the environment is quiet.

5. Elle is a systems analyst and project manager for a securities management firm in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. She is 40-years-old and has worked for more than 20 years. Her job is busy and challenging.

6. Fran is a 50-year-old Policy and Program Analyst from Ottawa, Ontario. Her office has an open-door policy and is relatively small.

7. Gen is a teacher in her 50s. Her work environment is busy and fun. Her colleagues are primarily female.

8. Hanna is a 25-year-old student who works for the University of Tennessee. She has experience working in marketing and communication; presently, she works in a quiet office comprised of older men.

9. Isla is a 53-year-old dental hygienist from Ottawa, Ontario who has worked in her same office for 16 years. She described her environment as friendly and open.

10. Jennifer is a 22-year-old receptionist at an all female staffed health office. The environment is very busy and the female boss is known for being very hard to work for.

11. Katherine is a 26-year-old lawyer who works for a major law firm in Ottawa, Ontario. Her company is one of the largest of its kind and boasts a very competitive environment. Katherine is the product of a successful female mentorship program.

Data Analysis

All interviews were recorded and later transcribed for the purpose of data analysis and coding. Transcriptions were completed by the principle researcher and ranged from one to three pages single spaced. Using the grounded theory method of organizing and interpreting data the first stage of analysis was the open-coding stage (Reinard, 2008). During this stage, five of the interviews were analyzed and initial metathemes were noted and categorized accordingly (Reinard, 2008). For the analysis, each theme that arose was given a color and after five occurrences of the theme was then set aside to be considered as a pattern to explore during the second stage (Reinard, 2008). The first stage revealed four patterns, which were then used in a comparative analysis of the last set of interviews (Reinard, 2008). The following patterns arose from the first stage of analysis: the normalcy of gossip in female office subcultures, the tensions that exist between women, the extent to which competing goals are related to occurrences of indirect social aggression, and finally questioning the power of the ambitious female archetype.

The interviews were consulted to identify and categorize additional themes and to see if there were any patterns that weren't directly apparent within the first stage of coding. Using a constant comparative approach, each interview was analyzed and then compared against one another for similarity or difference (Reinard, 2008). The open-coding strategies used to develop themes from comments allowed for a more holistic approach to data analysis and created the opportunity for categories that were both complimentary and contrasting to arise. This method created the opportunity for a picture of the challenging relationships between women who work together to arise from the data (Reinard, 2008).

The goal of the third stage was to find dissonance within the data and areas where the themes were challenged (Reinard, 2008). These negative cases were categorized to help provide context for positive data and help with refining each category to ensure the integrity of the theme (Reinard, 2008). To ensure that the qualitative data were credible, an 11th participant was recruited to provide an in-depth negative case analysis for this particular study. In a pre-screening conversation, this participant clearly expressed that she had not experienced indirect social aggression in her career despite the competitive nature of her field. This negative case was compared to all prior data to help refine categories and enrich the resulting discussion. The sub-themes that were a result of the addition of the negative case and the constant comparative analysis were the use of indirect social aggression as power, perception of social role in the office, the impact of mentorship, and the role informal socialization plays in office culture.

Methodological Limitations

Using an online survey presented both benefits and challenges as the participants may have felt more comfortable disclosing instances of aversive or bullying behaviors without the presence of the interviewer, however the online version did not allow for the same open-flow

communication and follow-up questions that the face-to-face interviews afforded. With that said, face-to-face interviewee's may have been hesitant to fully disclose their participation in gossip-spreading and indirect socially aggressive acts for fear of being perceived negatively.

From a theoretical perspective, grounded theory faces criticism because of the fact that it sets aside all theory (Reinard, 2008). According to Reinard (2008) choosing to use observations of raw phenomena instead of rooting research in a theoretical framework is considered "naïve" (p. 283). Secondly, the open-nature of grounded theory challenges the notion that it may be "inconsistent with the goals" of modern qualitative data methodological practices (Reinard, 2008, p. 283). Lastly, the repetitive nature of the categorization process, so that all themes include every angle of human behavior within that context, is considered by some to be forceful of the data rather than supportive or explanatory.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Using grounded theory and the process of constant comparative analysis, four meta-themes and three subthemes were uncovered. These themes reflect the truly intriguing nature of female relationships when tested in a professional setting. As stated by Litwin & Hallstein (2007), women place increased values on their relationships in any capacity, so when a woman feels slighted by a fellow female colleague that negative interaction ultimately carries more weight. These sentiments were reflected throughout the data collected; although the scenarios, personalities, and environments differed, the impact of indirect social aggression between women remained similar. The results paint a portrait of the myriad of tensions that exist deep within female subcultures in the workplace. The overarching research questions sought to explore how women perceived, communicated with, and were influenced by their female co-workers to gain more perspective of the dark side of female communication within a working environment. Ultimately, the data collected through interviews uncovered four metathemes: the normalcy of gossip; the impact relational tensions play in female colleague relationships; the extent to which competition impacts relationships; and the perception of the ambitious female. The sub-themes that arose support and in some way continue to explain the challenging nature of relationships between women. These sub-themes are the use of indirect social aggression as power, the importance of mentorship, the role informal socialization plays in office culture, and the perception of self within the workplace.

The Normalcy of Gossip

Of the various themes that arose throughout the research, competition, ambition, exclusion, and clique-behavior, gossip was by far the most prevalent with everyone stating that at one time they had witnessed, passed on, or been a victim of office gossip. Gossip, as described

by Houmanfar and Johnson (2003), is a defining feature of human communication globally. Moreover, gossip is considered to be the vehicle of choice for perpetrators of indirect social aggression in the workplace (Crothers, Lipinski, and Minotulo, 2009). Within the data collected for this study, all participants reported encountering or been a victim of organizational gossip. The effects of which were described as on the lesser end as "[the gossip happens] pretty much daily" to "[the gossip] actually drove me out of that job", which is representative of how powerful gossip can be within office social groups.

Throughout the interviews gossip was described a daily occurrence that was a main function of the female subgroups culture. An example of how normal gossip is within female social groups in the office was given by Isla, the 53-year-old dental hygienist describe how little of an impact gossip had on their ability to function thusly:

"Interviewer: Has there ever been gossip spread about an individual that compromised their ability to be successful in their role?

Isla: No, most of the rumors are of a personal nature.

Interviewer: So [the gossip] isn't [about an individuals work habits] or general catty professional based gossip?

Isla: Catty professional-based gossip? Yes.

Interviewer: But you don't think it impacts people's ability to function in the office?

Isla: No, because it happens every day, all day long."

In Isla's office of 30 employee's only one is male. This provided the research with an interesting insight into what primarily female work cultures may look like. These results align with previous research recognizing gossip is used throughout culture, sex, nationality, and age as a way to differentiate between insiders and outsiders, with the emphasis being on the innate need

for such hierarchies to exist (Houmanfar & Johnson, 2003). The prevalence was so common, that it was described as a mere manifestation of acceptable organizational dysfunction. As Allison, an administrative assistant for a small family-owned company stated:

"*Everyone talks about everyone behind their backs at some point; nothing is ever malicious, just a bit dysfunctional. It's primarily about work habits, and if people would just talk to the source I'm sure things could be resolved much faster.*"

Ultimately, the issue at hand seems to be less about the prevalence of gossip and more about its overall impact on the culture within the female subgroups. The impact itself is so important because as noted by Litwin and Hallstein (2007) women expect their female colleagues to "act like a female friend" in office situations. When that doesn't happen or the bonds of trust are broken, the target is liable to feel hurt, disappointed, or betrayed and therefore working together becomes a challenge as the target may have lingering feelings of resentment, inadequacy, or anger. Ultimately, these tensions can't exist within an effective office culture because the flow of communication is halted by the two or more parties involved in conflict.

An example of the impact of gossip can have on the target's ability to successfully perform in their role is told best by Elle. Elle, a systems analyst in a major securities firm shared about how the gossip she faced from a female coworker became so intense and overwhelming that she felt forced her to leave her position and find new employment.

"*Interviewer: What did the drama look like?*

Elle: Exclusion, gossip, rumors etc. [The drama] actually drove me out of that job. I loved that job and was very, very good at that job. I loved the interaction with people, there was always a new challenge, but when I would come back to the office there was the token female who had been in there for decades and just didn't have the skills to be in

her present role so she just never was able to move up. She was never interested in

learning anything to help her move up. She just stood around and talked to people and

she liked to massage people – make baby blankets for women expecting or food for all the

guys. Someone who was constantly trying to win you over. Shortly after I'd joined the

group I was promoted above her, even though she had been there three years longer than

me. She pretty much set out to destroy whatever I had built and she did it really well.

Interviewer: What tactics did she use?

Elle: She constantly questioned what I was doing, but not by questioning me, by

questioning my work to other people. She made me lose confidence in what I was doing.

The project that finally pushed me to leave had me working remotely so I was at the

facility working and she was at the office saying "Why is Elle doing that?" and "Did you

hear what Elle was saying." . . . It was very ugly and she got what she deserved. It came

full circle after I left."

The scenario above is an example of the various tactics used by women to isolate a

female co-worker by using gossip as a tool to impact the social and professional female

hierarchy. By constantly questioning the integrity of Elle's work, her co-worker developed a

situation where Elle's colleagues questioned her abilities. This would have made Elle's chances

of being successful in her role more challenging as fellow colleagues may consider her less

valuable, less trustworthy, less capable, and less deserving of time, effort, and friendship. All the

aforementioned factors make it seemingly impossible for a woman like Elle to move up in her

career as she completely lacked a social support system within her workplace. From the

perpetrators perspective, this is a great example of gossip being used to shield the perpetrator and

further alienate the target. By spreading such vicious gossip about the integrity of Elle's work,

the perpetrator positioned her self as an information-provider and she was able to use gossip as a vehicle from which to gain trust and increase her value within the office.

Additionally, Elle spoke of losing confidence in her abilities as a result of being a target of organizational gossip. As stated by Hickman (2006) being a target of indirect social aggression leads a plethora of negative consequences particularly as they relate to workplace satisfaction. In Elle's case, having to constantly justify her work made her in turn question whether she was really as competent in her role as she believed. Additionally, Elle shared what frustrated her most about how she responded to the gossip by saying "*I just got to the point were [the job] starting to change me. That's where I drew the line. I started saying things that I never would have said in the past professionally.*" Elle was impacted by the gossip not only professionally, but also personally. In response to having to defend herself regularly she became a mirror image of the individual who was targeting her and trying to leverage social power through manipulation and indirect aggression.

Managing gossip and the power of female intervention. As shown through the example of Elle's experience gossip is a powerful tool. Anthropologically speaking, it's essential for building relationships, but also can be a weapon, with which the wielder gains access, power, and the ability to alienate an individual from the group (Houmanfar & Johnson, 2007). To foster positive workspaces, where women can excel without the fear of retribution from the "herd," it is important to create environments where employees can openly discuss with management any instances of social aggression that may be impacting their ability to succeed in their role. When asked what was needed from management to keep her in her role, Elle said of her female manager:

"She could've given me a lot more support. She never raised the demon. It could've been that she was overworked; in my last job it was notorious that the managers had so much work that they couldn't manage their staff. I don't know if that was it or if she just didn't want to work on team building. I don't know what it was."

This need for more support that Elle discussed really articulates another facet of the complicated nature of female relationships in the office and that's the desire for and lack of female support and intervention. Jennifer, the receptionist at an all-female health clinic, offered an insight into what an office with a strict no-gossip policy looked like and how it benefitted the culture and community.

"When it comes to gossip at this office the office manager is really quick to jump on it to the point of it comes out of someone's mouth and then two seconds later she's questioning you about it. It's pretty hard to [pass along] detrimental gossip because it gets solved so quickly."

This intervening act creates a barrier between the negative impact of gossip and the place where small amounts of gossip can help build trust and relationships. Where Elle would have directly benefitted from any form of supervisory intervention, Jennifer has a manager who openly discusses instances of gossip with her staff and fosters a culture where negative and hurtful gossip is not accepted. This intervention tactic impacts the environment in two ways, firstly by intervening in the cycle of gossip, Jennifer's manager shows staff that they have a support system in their management staff and secondly, it stops a negative cycle at the root thereby, making it hard for a perpetrator to gain power by spreading a rumor because the power has been removed through intervention and truth of the statement revealed to all parties involved.

Relational Dialectics between Female Employees

It's no surprise that the women interviewed spoke of the many tensions they face in their relationships at work. As Kanter (1977a) discussed in *Men and Women of the Corporation,* women occupy a variety of roles throughout their lives and this multi-dimensionality both helps and hinders how women build and manage relationships in the office. The second metatheme that arose from the data is that women manage a variety of relational dialectics within their relationships at work. They struggle with trying to be a part of the in-crowd, which is comparable to the feelings described by Catanzaro (2011) in regards to adolescent females managing social expectations and they have conflicting views of their female peers, on one hand they desire to engage in mentoring opportunities, but on the other hand they lack opportunities or struggle to develop relationships where mentoring discussions can occur.

Being a part of the in-crowd. The first subtheme of this metatheme that arose was the desire of participants to be a part of the in-crowd and how being isolated from in-groups affected work satisfaction. Brenda, a partner in an investment firm, recounted an experience she witnessed where a female employee was excluded from informal socialization.

> *"We had one very strange girl. She was very awkward and tried too hard to get people to like her. She was often excluded from after-work drinks etc. It was much like high school where you see the popular girls [think] she is weird and you have all the guys who want to be with the popular girls so if they [the popular girls] don't like Morgan, then the guys don't invite her [out to drinks]. Funny how things seldom change!"*

Being invited to participate in those informal socialization events is important to building key relationships with fellow co-workers and stakeholders, but it's also a sign of one's status within the workplace. As Katherine, a 26-year-old lawyer stated in the interaction below:

Interviewer: How beneficial were those informal events to your overall experience?

Katherine: I think they were hugely important in terms of my learning curve and my feeling of comfort in the office. I benefitted by knowing that the partners, associates, and students had my back and would be there [if I needed them]."

Whether it is drinks after work or sideline conversations by the water cooler, being a part of informal events provide women with the opportunity to build their own social support networks and affords them value as great team members. The excerpts above also demonstrate the similarities between how adult and adolescent women create social hierarchy in their subcultures. As Catanzaro (2011) stated in her research on indirect social aggression in young women, when a girl doesn't meet the social norm, those who do meet the standards, actively isolate and exclude the individual as punishment. In these cases both participants were privy to in-group status and were able to recognize the positive impact that had on work experience.

A complicated desire for mentorship. The second subtheme to arise from the data within the relational dialectics metatheme is the conflicting desire for more social support by the interviewee's, but the lack of opportunities available. As Isla, the 53-year-old dental hygienist, stated in the interaction below:

Interviewer: Have you ever asked a fellow female colleague about career advice?

Isla: You know, unfortunately no, because I've always been the oldest.

Interviewer: Do you think that if you had that opportunity you would have taken it?:

Isla: Yes

Interviewer: Why do you think it would have been beneficial to have someone to speak to or ask questions of?

Isla: It gives you valuable insight about your profession your um, tasks your expected to perform. If you're not sure about what the task might be. Instead of figuring it out yourself, the mentor would guide you through this process.

Despite Isla's interest in having a mentor to help guide her career path, she also spoke of the deep conflict that took place within her office of mostly women.

Interviewer: Tell me about an instance of conflict and why you think that arose.

Isla: Oh my goodness there's a million different instances. Um. Latest instance would be where two coworkers, one who works under the other, and um, is not interested in, doesn't like to do what she's asked to do. So, when she doesn't do what she's asked to do it creates conflict.

These two statements are representative of contradiction between the desire to learn from female colleagues and the culture of gossip and conflict that plagues female subcultures in organizational settings. In Isla's case, her office is all women and a perfect example how even amidst a collection of individuals who understand the unique experiences of the female sex, women allow conflict to rule over reason and shared learning. The conflicts that participants shared ranged from office disagreements to instances where women felt like their female colleagues "threw them under the bus". However, despite a consistent running commentary reflective of how cruel women can be to one another, when asked about engaging in mentorship opportunities participants reported incredibly positive experiences. Brenda, the partner in an investment firm said this of her female mentor "*I thought she was wonderful.. She was an innovator and a legend in her field and I continue to have a deep respect for her. She deeply believed in hard work, honesty, and doing whatever was best for the client.*" Additionally, Katherine, the lawyer with a major national firm, shared her experiences with her mentor thusly:

"[In my profession] there is competition, but outside of that the women made a concerted and directed effort to help each other and I had some amazing mentors. Women who were whip smart and had great social lives with great positive outlooks and definitely I looked up to them. They were very open and talked quite frankly about their experiences and feelings about the workplace."

Brenda and Katherine's positive experiences with their mentor's showcase the positive impact of mentoring on the career trajectory of younger employee's. However, there are disconnects that the data revealed that explains why mentorship within an office is not always a possibility. The experiences of Jennifer, a twenty-two year old receptionist at an all-female health clinic, are representative of a culture that doesn't allow for social support communities to develop.

"[The female hiring manager] pretty much told me to avoid my [female] boss at all costs if I wanted survive. [The hiring manager] had a hard time filling the role before me... because the owner is very hard to work for."

In contrast to Katherine's experiences, Jennifer's work environment, was such that communication between the owner and her employees was non-existent therefore no opportunities to learn and grow through knowledge sharing could exist. In Jennifer's office, the female owner has created a culture where the leaders within her office are not approachable thereby creating a barrier between the lower-level employees and those in upper-level positions. This divide makes learning and growing from those leaders of the field nearly impossible, because no relationships can be built.

Competing Goals and Indirect Social Aggression

The third metatheme explored how an organizations environment was connected to increased occurrences of indirect social aggression. Competition was discussed by participants in

terms of how it further aggravated the sometimes tense relationships between women, particularly in fields where deadlines fuel the company fire. Competition between women was described as *"fierce, but supportive"* and *"hard to define."* However, in fields where the sense of organizational urgency is heightened such as in law, marketing, and business, competition was connected to increased manipulation between women. Hannah, a communications coordinator expressed her frustrations with the competitive nature of her job thusly:

> *"Interviewer: What does competition look like in your office?*
>
> *Hannah: Competition in my last job was pretty fierce. There was a girl in a similar position as me and she would throw me under the bus whenever she had an opportunity to do so. It got to the point where our meetings were more about [pointing out each others flaws to our manager] than about what needed to get done. I eventually quit because I was tired of spending all my time defending my work.*
>
> *Interviewer: Why do you think she would throw you under the bus?*
>
> *Hannah: I honestly think she wanted to run my campaigns and resented how much responsibility I had. Now, I don't know that for certain, but there were times when she'd invite herself to meetings between me and one of the corporate clients and then tell my manager how she would have handled the conversation differently.*
>
> *Interviewer: What made things so intense between the two of you?*
>
> *Hannah: I don't know if there was any single thing that made us so competitive. Don't get me wrong there were definitely times when we really enjoyed each other's company. We were both pretty similar I guess. It [the feelings of competitiveness] probably could have come from me. I went from being in an office of just two of us who worked really*

well together to being in an office with three people I didn't know and didn't work well

with. Maybe I was just trying to prove that because I was there first I was better. "

Hannah's experience with having a colleague who would "throw her under the bus" is an

example of a power struggle between two young women who couldn't manage their competing

interests. As Hannah states, this competition and inability to communicate on the same level

destroyed their working relationship. Using basic evolutionary theory to frame the above

interaction, Hannah experienced first-hand the feeling of being depreciated by an individual who

was basically competing for resources with her, which in this instance could have been attention,

opportunities or tasks, organizational value and worth, or popularity with other staff members

(Anderson & Reid, 2009). Whatever the deep set cause, the environment in their office

facilitated a culture where indirect social aggression between the two women was acceptable. As

stated by Litwin and Hallstein (2007) the managerial challenge in identifying and putting a stop

to indirect social aggression between female co-workers is the assumption that women also

possess strong conflict negotiation skills in the same respect that men do. Moreover, managers

often believe that the best method of conflict management between women is to allow the

women to manage it (Litwin & Hallstein, 2007). This thought process operates with the

assumption that all staff (regardless of sex) possesses the same conflict and negotiation skills.

Unfortunately, herein rests the opportunity for more specialized management education for

women, because not all are as adept at managing and negotiating conflict as their male

counterparts. However with more awareness of how best to intervene in situations where two

females are competing for resources in the office, managers can actively intervene and help both

women focus their competitive natures to ensure that the office environment is negatively

affected by their conflict (Litwin & Hallstein, 2007).

On the opposite spectrum, Diane, a teacher experienced competing interests and goals in an environment, where discussion and debate ruled conflicted conversations.

"…Perhaps competition takes the form of heated discussions on how a student should be helped, or disciplined, or even granted an extension. In a school it's really hard to decipher what being competitive means."

Another differing factor in how environment shapes how competition manifests can be exampled through Isla's observations of her female coworkers. Isla described how she experienced competition in her office and reflected on how the administrative staff competed for the attention of the lone male employee, the dentist.

Interviewer: Have you ever felt or witnessed competition in your office? It could be competition for attention, position or power?

Isla: Um. I think maybe I've see competition for attention. Or competition for, in our front desk we have competition for um, to see who is doing the best job. They compete with each other for the attention of the dentist.

Interviewer: What does that competition look like?

Isla: Sometimes it bragging, but not that often. It's sort of an underhanded "did you notice that so and so didn't do this" "so and so was supposed to send a letter, but they didn't" "or I had to fix this for so and so" or "so and so made a mistake" it's generally almost like tattling.

Interviewer: Why do you think they compete for the dentist's attention?

Isla: God knows. Because I think it makes them feel important.

Isla's experience, although different from the other examples brings in a completely knew factor because the administrative assistants were competing for male attention and in this case, the lone

male was also the boss. By devaluing their peers the administrative assistants in question were both promoting themselves and degrading their competition in front of the alpha male in order to secure their power status in relation to their peers (Anderson & Reid, 2009). Having a male at the top of a company filled with women may possibly create an environment that basically fosters intersex competition and possibly challenges those who choose not to compete by leaving them victims of indirect social aggression.

The results from this research indicate that not only does the feeling of competition fluctuate from person to person, but also the different environments promote acts of indirect social aggression in response to increased feelings of competition in a variety of different ways. Collectively, the data indicates that the environment and overarching organizational culture is related to how indirect social aggression develops between women. The more intense the organizational culture, the more intense result of the competition as was seen in the case of Hannah leaving her position to escape the conflict.

Although, the scenarios differ, the one thing that the data and literature agree upon is that competition is a constant whether the environment is high-urgency or low-urgency. Whether competition manifests as open social warfare or as heated discussion and debate, competition exists throughout the female workplace experience.

The Myth of the Ambitious Female

The fourth meta-theme was resultant of a concerted effort to explore if there were any contrasts between the perception of ambitious women and how women related to very strong-willed female coworkers. Participants mused on the image or "myth" of the ambitious female with overwhelming positive remarks, often comparing their perception of self with the perception of the "myth". As Katherine stated "*I get excited about [them]! I think [ambitious*

women] scream of powerful interesting women who I'd like to be and meet." The idea of a

strong, willful, and almost masculinized corporate woman was for some a picture of inspiration,

but for others, this image still conjures up sentiments of cold, calculating, and cruel women, like

that of Patty Hewes (played by Glenn Close), the cutthroat layer from FX's *Damages*.

Isla, the dental hygienist said

"In general, hmm, I sort of think that the type of person who wants to climb the corporate

ladder can sometimes be a self-, hmm, pushy, someone who will try to get to the top at all

costs, Doesn't matter who they undermine or put down along the way."

The point Isla makes is that successful women such as Dawn Steel, the first woman to

run a major Hollywood movie studio, have to fight to be able to make it to the top of their field

and their sacrifices present themselves as unfeminine and culturally awkward (Kwolek-Folland,

1998). Like any stereotype this negative idea of ambitious women who want to get to the top at

all costs stems from somewhere and although participants spoke excitedly of the idea of an

ambitious female, in the same breath participants shared their frustrations of working for a

woman who embodies the characteristics of an ambitious female. In her interview, Hannah

commented on the dark side of working for a woman, who had to fight her way to the top,

"I don't always love working for them, because they have incredibly high expectations. I

understand and respect where those expectations come from because I think ambitious

women feel as if they have to be the best in their role to be able to advocate for their own

abilities."

Within this statement, Hannah speaks to two very important points regarding the archetype of the

ambitious female. Firstly, Hannah states that working under a woman who exhibits strong or

even masculine characteristics is challenging. This can be explained by using Tall Poppy

Syndrome in conjunction with Litwin and Hallstein's (2007) principle that women have

unrealistic expectations of their female colleagues and managers (Mancl & Pennington, 2011).

Using Tall Poppy Syndrome as a framework for understanding these tensions Hannah,

seeing the successes of a strong female manager, may interpret success as straying from the norm

of the culture of the office (Mancl &Pennington, 2011: Kanter, 1977). Moreover, as stated by

Litwin and Hallstein (2007) Hannah may also expect her female manager to treat their

relationship as a friendship despite the differences in their power status within the office. By

placing value on the relationship, Hannah becomes susceptible to being hurt, feeling betrayed, or

even feeling unduly targeted by her manager because of her unrealistic expectations of their

relationship. These unmet relational expectations then in turn may further propagate the

perception of a strong, ambitious female manager as mean or cruel.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The responses of this study and research speak to existence, prevalence, and overall impact or indirect social aggression in the workplace between women. Gossip, exclusion, social isolation, and manipulation committed by female employees creates dysfunctional work environments and makes it impossible for certain women to move upward throughout their organization and grow as professionals in their roles (Crothers, Lipinski, & Minotulo, 2009; Harvey et. al., 2006; Hafen, 2009; Litwin & Hallstein, 2007). Beyond the existence of indirect social aggression between women, this study revealed a plethora of contradictions between what women want and what they have access to. Women from varying backgrounds discussed their interests in participating in mentor relationships, however the companies that they worked for didn't create a culture where inter-level, and intersex professional development was actively supported. According to Ragins (1989) having a strong female support system is directly linked to increased feelings of job satisfaction, self-confidence, and increased access to opportunities for promotion. Therefore, it's important for organizations to recognize that they can be doing a better job at supporting their female employees. By creating and fostering an organizational environment that supports mentorship between women and practices open dialogues surrounding indirect social aggression between colleagues, managers create the opportunity to increase not only effectiveness, but also the happiness of their employees.

The meta-themes and sub-themes of this research are representative of a group of women from varying backgrounds, of varying ages, and with varying experience, however therein lie distinct similarities in their relationships with their female coworkers. The tensions revealed in this study between women within the workplace bring to light the dark side of these female relationships in the office. All participants reported witnessing or experiencing gossip,

competition, and intersex conflict within their office. The consistency throughout the data proves that the dark side of female relationships isn't just a social phenomenon; indirect social aggression between women in professional settings is a real issue and something that managers and scholars need to study and explore.

Recommendations

The data revealed within this study created the framework from which the following recommendations were constructed.

Creating a culture of positive self-disclosure. As was discussed earlier in this study, gossip remained above all other forms of indirect social aggression as the leading tool used to isolate and manipulate targets and their peers. With that said, Jennifer, the 22-year-old receptionist spoke of the role her female office manager plays in managing and controlling gossip in the office as an interventionist who actively stops and manages gossip, which could be detrimental to the work environment. The management technique of using the office manager role to not only manage the administration and efficiency of a workplace, but also the culture and how employees relate to one another can set the tone for a culture where negative gossip can't grow and live. Gossip is a part of our greater societal culture and therefore it's almost impossible to eradicate in any social situation, however with that said it doesn't mean it can't be managed, focused, and controlled (Houmanfar & Johnson, 2003). Gossip can be used as a tool to engender trust in fellow coworkers and share information can be a good thing as long as it isn't allowed to develop into a weapon used to manage social status among employees (Houmanfar & Johnson, 2003).

The overarching recommendation in regards to managing gossip is creating tools to train managers on how to identify and talk about indirect social aggression in the office. Gossip is so

effective because it exists in the shadows, but when it is brought to the forefront of the conversation, gossip becomes less of a weapon and more of an opportunity to share truths, experiences, and knowledge.

Fostering focused competition. Throughout the long interviews, competition was connected to conflict and like gossip; intersex competition is an evolutionary mechanism. In the case of Hannah, the competition that arose between both female employees was so unfocused and out of control that the efficiency and effectiveness of the office was compromised, which is the worse case scenario for any manager. The data reflects a deep need for a more strategic approach to managing tensions between women. It's important to continue catalyzing conversations about how men and women differ in how they compete within their sex. The tactics used to assert power in female organizational subgroups is executed in the shadows and unlike the aggression displayed by men in similar settings, indirect social aggression is hard to report to management as it comes across as "she said, she said." Therefore, it's integral for managers and business owners to focus how female employees compete with one another.

The results of this study beg the further question of whether women are possibly the reason why the glass ceiling endures. If competition manifests in manipulative and indirect fashion, it can be hard for a manager to identify the cause of the communication problems among staff members. Indirect social aggression by nature protects the perpetrator and further isolates the victim (Catanzaro, 2011), but what if managers were trained to identify and create conversations around the prevalence of relationally aggressive acts between women in a way that made it easier for women to speak to their supervisors if they happened to become a victim of it? Could bringing this dark side of female relationships into the light possibly change the self-destructing nature of female relationships when tested by competing interests?

A recommendation for achieving focused competition and providing a voice for women to discuss their challenges with other women is by developing focused female-female mentoring programs within the organization. This serves two purposes, firstly by providing women with an unbiased listener who can provide insight and guidance to keep younger employees focused on their role and also as a link to upper management who can communicate the realities of more entry-level employees.

Managing unrealistic friendship expectations. The third recommendation is also directed towards management teams. The unrealistic expectations women have regarding the quality of their relationships with female co-workers has negative repercussions. These unrealistic expectations can leave individuals susceptible to increased feelings of hurt and betrayal when relationships don't meet the perceived standards. As stated by Litwin and Hallstein (2007) women carry with them the idea that women in the office should band together and as is exampled through the results of this study, that isn't always the case. It's more important for female colleagues to practice communicating their expectations for office relationships than to spend time dealing with the consequences of hurt feelings.

This study recommends that through training, female managers should be taught to clearly communicate and define their boundaries with female employees. Research suggests that women will value relationships with their female coworkers more than the relationship itself may warrant (Litwin & Hallstein, 2007). Therefore, it's important for female managers to have the tools necessary for sharing their relational concerns with staff without fear of indirect retribution or without sacrificing working relationships.

Education is always the answer. On a large scale there are many standpoints from which specialized curriculums can be developed that teach university-aged women about

managing relationships in the workplace and creating the space for women to speak candidly about their experiences with indirect social aggression. By bringing these behaviors out from the shadows and into the light, the conversations alone provide individuals with the skills to identify and manage indirect social aggression in their professional careers, if or when it happens. Also, developing curriculums that are specific to the female experience create the opportunity for more women to learn skills that may not be inherent to their skillset and can aid in their understanding of bridging a patriarchal corporate world with feminine perspectives and insights.

Limitations

This study was limited in respect to the process in which interviews were conducted. The interview guide was segmented into differing themes, which came across to some participants as sporadic and it inhibited open conversation. As more participants were interviewed this process was streamlined, but it did take approximately three interviews for the interviews to run smoothly. Through the streamlining process questions that asked participants about promotions they may have received were given less importance and after looking through this study more data on upward progression patterns could have painted a more complete picture of the connection between female conflict and upward progression.

Additionally, there were missed opportunities to further explore individual's experiences with unrealistic expectations of friendships in the office, which could have contributed a dynamic perspective to the research.

Finally, the online interview option provided unique challenges because non-verbal messages were missed by the researcher. Being able to witness the non-verbal reactions to certain questions provided the researcher with opportunities to press forward with a question.

With the online option, subtle non-verbal cues were not seen therefore, it's possible that more rich data could have been mined had they been apparent.

Future Research

Future research should look to narrow this study by exploring the unique communicative habits of women within differing fields or sectors. As this study pulled participants from a wealth of disciplines, it would be interesting to identify whether the results of this study differ from sector to sector. Additionally, as this research only sought views from female participants, a male participant could have provided more insight on how women interact with one another within the office from the perspective of an outsider.

Implications

This study is unique in that it explores the female-to-female dynamics impacting whether a woman feels empowered and supported enough to progress upwardly within her organization. Generally, glass ceiling and feminist organizational communication research explore primarily the impact of white men on the opportunities of those not in the majority; however, this study suggests that although the patriarchal nature of organizations impacts opportunities for women to be successful, there may be outside factors that are equal contributors. The implications of this study are multifaceted. First, by exploring the unique relational tensions that exist within female organizational relationships, this research discovered that indirect social aggression exists in a variety of fields and disciplines, it can be exaggerated by various environmental factors, and the unrealistic expectations rooted in female relationships confront the professional integrity and reputation of female managers. From a research perspective, this research has far-reaching implications as it casts a critical eye on the dark side of female relationships in the office and

offers a new perspective towards the unique dynamics that further challenge the upward

progression of women.

LIST OF REFERENCES

REFERENCES

Aldoory, L., & Toth, E. (2002). Gender discrepancies in a gendered profession?: A developing

theory for public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 14*, 103-126.

Anderson, G., & Reid, S. (2009, May). *Indirect aggression among women explained by

competitive mating strategies and digit ratio asymmetry*. Paper presented at the

International Communication Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL.

Bjorkvist, K., Osterman, K., & Kaukiainen, A. (1992). The development of direct and indirect

aggressive strategies in males and females. In K. Bjorkvist & P. Niemela (EDs.), *Of mice

and women: Aspects of female aggression* (p. 51-64). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage.*

Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Bullis, C. (2005). From productivity servant to foundation to connection: One history of

organizational communication. *Management Communication Quarterly, 18*(4), 595-603.

doi:10.1177/0893318904273737

Buzzanell, P.M. (2000). The promise and practice of the new career and social contract. In

P. Buzzanell (Ed.), *Reorganizing organizational and managerial communication from

feminist perspectives* (p. 3-23). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Buzzanell, P. M., & Stohl, C. (1999). The Redding tradition of organizational communication

scholarship: W. Charles Redding and his legacy. *Communication Studies*, *50*(4), 324.

Callahan, J. L., & Tomaszewski, L. (2007). Navigating the good ol' boys club: Women,

marginality, and communities of practice in a military non-profit organization. *Studies in

Continuing Education, 29*(3), 259-276.

Catanzaro, M. F. (2011). Indirect aggression, bullying and female teen victimization: A literature

review. *Pastoral care in education: An international journal of personal, social and emotional development, 29*(2), 83-101.

Clair, R. (1999). Standing still in an ancient field. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *13*(2), 283.

Cline, C.G., Toth, E., Turk, J.V.,Walters, L.M., Johnson, N., & Smith, H. (1986). The velvet ghetto: The impact of the increasing percentage of women in public relations and business communication. San Francisco: International Association of Business Communicators

Coyne, S. M. & Whitehead, E. (2008) Indirect aggression in animated Disney films. *Journal of Communication, 58,* 382-395.

Crick, N.R. & Grotpeter, J.K. (1995) Indirect social aggression, gender, and social psychological adjustment. *Child Development, 66*, 710-722.

Crothers, L.M., Lipinski, J., & Minutolo, M.C. (2009). Cliques, rumors, and gossip by the water cooler: Female bullying in the workplace. *The Psychologist-Manager Journal, 12*, 97-110.

Cunningham, D., Randolph, T., & Wagoner, K. (2012) *Student Data.* (UTK 2011-12 Fact Book). Retrieved from University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Office of Institutional Research and Assessment website: https://oira/utk.edu/factbook.

Deetz, S. (1992). *Democracy in an age of corporate colonialism: Developments in communication and the policies of everyday life.* Albany: SUNY.

Dow, B. J., & Tonn, M. B. (1993). Feminine style and political judgment in the rhetoric of Ann Richards. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 79*(3), 286-303.

Dunbar, R. I. M. (2004). Gossip in evolutionary perspective. *Review of General Psychology, 8,* 100–110.

Eichenbaum, L., & Orbach, S. (1987). *Between women: Love, envy, and competition in women's friendships.* New York: Viking Press.

Farley, S. D., Timme, D. R., & Hart, J. W. (2010). On coffee talk and break-room chatter: Perceptions of women who gossip in the workplace. *Journal Of Social Psychology, 150*(4), 361-368.

Feshbach, N.D. (1969). Sex differences in children's modes of aggressive responses toward outsiders. *Merill-Palmer Quarterly, 15*, 249-258.

Fine, M.G., & Buzzanell, P.M. (2000). Walking the high wire: Leadership theorizing, daily acts, and tensions. In P. Buzzanell (Ed.), *Reorganizing organizational and managerial communication from feminist perspectives* (p. 3-23). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Frisby, B., Dillow, M., Gaughan, S., & Nordlund, J. (May, 2009). *Flirtatious communication: An experimental examination of perceptions of social-sexual communication motivated by evolutionary forces.* Paper presented at the International Communication Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL.

Glendinning, P.M. (2001) Workplace bullying: Curing the cancer of the American workplace. *Public Personnel Management, 30*, 269-286.

Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior.* Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods, 18*(59), 59-82.

Hafen, S. (2009). Organizational gossip: A revolving door of regulation and resistance. *Southern Communication Journal, 69*(3), 223-240.

Harvey, M. G., Heames, J. T., Richey, R. G., & Leonard, N. (2006). Bullying: From the playground to the boardroom. *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies, 12,* 1–11.

Hickman, S.E. (2006). Examining relational aggression and victimization in the workplace. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering, 66*, 5731.

Hon, L.C. (1995) Toward a feminist theory of public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 7*, 27-88.

Houmanfar, R., & Johnson, R. (2003). Organizational implications of gossip and rumor. *Journal of Organizational Behavior Management, 23*(2), 117-138. doi:10.1300/J075v23n02_07

Kanter, R.M. (1977a) *Men and women of the corporation.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Kanter, R.M. (1977b) Some effects of proportions on group life: Skewed sex ratios and responses to token women. *American Journal of Sociology, 82,* 965-990.

Koener, A. F., & Floyd, K. (2009). Evolutionary perspectives on interpersonal relationships. In S. Smith & S. Wilson (Eds.), *Interpersonal communication research* (p. 27-47). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Kuzel, A. (1992). Sampling in qualitative inquiry. In B. Crabtree & W. Miller (Eds.), *Doing Qualitative Research* (p. 31-44). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Kwolek-Folland, A. (1998). *Incorporating Women: A history of women and business in the United States.* New York, NY:Twayne Publishers.

Litwin, A.H., & Hallstein, L.O. (2007). Shadows and silences: How women's positioning and unspoken friendship rules in organizational settings cultivate difficulties among some women at work. *Women Studies in Communication, 30,* 111-141.

Lyness, K.S., & Thompson, D.E. (2000). Climbing the corporate ladder: Do female and male executives follow the same route? *Journal of Applied Psychology, 85,* 86-101.

Mancl, A.C., & Penington, B. (2011). Tall poppies in the workplace: Communication strategies used by envious others in response to successful women. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication, 12,* 79-86.

Marmefelt, T. (2009). Human knowledge, rules, and the spontaneous evolution of society in the social thought of Darwin, Hayek, and Boulding. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization, 71*(1), 62-74.

McGill, B. (2012, March 12) The gender divide. *The National Journal*. Retrieved from http://www.nationaljournal.com/njonline/no_20100508_1960.php/infographic-the-gender-divide-20120319.

Meyer, M., Stern, D., & Waldron, L. (November, 2008). Interrogating mean girls: Feminist implications of mediated representations of alternative aggression. Paper presented at the National Communication Association Annual Convention, San Diego, CA.

Monahan, J., Brown-Givens, S., & Shtrulis, I. (May, 2003). Priming and stereotyping: How mediated images affect perceptions in interpersonal contexts. Paper presented at the International Communication Association Annual Meeting, San Diego, CA.

Morley, D., & Shockley-Zalabak, P. (1985). An exploratory study of the organizational patterns of males and females. *Communication Research Reports, 2*(1), 103-111.

Mumby, D.K. (2000). Communication, organization, and the public sphere. In P. Buzzanell

    (Ed.), *Reorganizing organizational and managerial communication from feminist*

    perspectives (p. 3-23). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Mumby, D.K. (1996). Feminism, postmodernism, and organizational communication studies: A

    critical reading. *Management Communication Quarterly, 9*, 259-295.

Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what can we do*. Cambridge, MA:

    Blackwell Publishers.

Putnam, L. (1982). Paradigms for organizational communication research: An overview and

    synthesis. *Western Journal of Speech Communication, 46,* 192-206.

Ragins, B.R. (1989). Barriers to mentoring: The female manager's dilemma. *Human Relations,*

    42, 1-22.

Rakow, L., & Nastasia, D. (May, 2008). On Feminist Theory of Public Relations: An Example

    From Dorothy E. Smith. Paper presented at the International Communication Association

    Annual Conference, Montreal, QC.

Reich, M.H. (1985). Executive views from both sides of mentoring. *Personnel, 62*(3), 42-46.

Reinard, J.C. (2008). *Introduction to Communication Research.* New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Rogers, E. M. (1994). A *history of communication study*: *A biographical approach.* New York,

    NY: The Free Press.

Rucker, M. L., & Gendrin, D. M. (2007). Self-construal, interpersonal communication

    satisfaction, and communication style: Engendering differences. *Human Communication*,

    10(4), 437-449.

Shoemaker, P. (1991). *Gatekeeping.* Newberry Park, California: Sage.

Smith, J., & Calasanti, T. (2005). The influences of gender, race, and ethnicity on workplace experiences of social and institutional isolation: An exploratory study of university faculty. *Sociological Spectrum, 25*(3), 307-334.

U.S. Department of Labor. (1991). *A report on the glass ceiling initiative.* Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Willer, E., & Cupach, W.R. (2008). When "sugar and spice" turn to "fire and ice": Factors affecting the adverse consequences of indirect social aggression among adolescent girls. *Communication Studies, 59*(4), 419-429.

Willer, E., & Koenig-Kellas, J. (2009). Social aggression sequences among women: An examination of socially aggressive acts, responses, and counter-responses in relation to interpersonal forgiveness. Paper presented at the National Communication Association Convention, Chicago, IL.

Wilkins, B. M., & Andersen, P. A. (1991). Gender difference and similarities in management communication. *Management Communication Quarterly, 5*(1), 6.

Workplace Bullying Institute. (2010). *2010 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey.* Retrieved from http://www.workplacebullying.org/wbiresearch/2010-wbi-national-survey/.

Wrigley, B. J. (2002). Glass ceiling? What glass ceiling? A qualitative study of how women view the glass ceiling in public relations and communications management. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 14*, 27-55.

APPENDIX

Interview/ Open-Ended Survey Questions

Age:

Career Field:

How large (number of employees) is the company you work for?

How many years have you been a part of the work force?

Describe the environment in which you work:

How did you learn the ropes or the way things work around your office?

Tell me about the relationships you have with the women in your office:

What would you tell a new female employee in your office to help them thrive/survive?

Tell me about the last time you asked a fellow female employee for career advice?

Tell me about your most poignant mentor relationship:

What would encourage you to be a mentor?

What concerns do you have about being a mentor to a young female professional in your field?

What are some of the major communication obstacles you face in your office?

Tell me about a time when there was a major conflict between two or more females in your

      office?

Tell me about a time when you felt isolated or excluded by your coworkers:

Tell me about how gossip circulates in your office:

Tell me about a time when you heard about, passed along, or were the target of a rumor in your

      office:

Tell me about a time when a female coworker made you frustrated or angry. What did you do

      about it?

What does conflict between women look like in your office:

Tell me about a time when you had to compete for a promotion or opportunity in your office:

What does competition look like in your office?

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Female to Female Communication in the Workplace

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Katelyn Brownlee, University of

Tennessee, Knoxville. To participate you must be 18 years of age or older, if you do not meet the

age requirements please notify the researcher immediately. We hope to learn about your

experiences with female-to-female relational aggression within the workplace.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

If you decide to participate, you will be asked questions about your experiences in the workplace

as they relate to female-to-female communication.

You will be asked to sit down with the interviewer for no longer than 45 minutes. Once you have

left the conversation you will not be contacted by the researcher.

All sessions will be audiotaped. These tapes will be used for the purpose of this study alone and

once this study is completed they will be archived and then destroyed.

RISKS

This interview will be conducted at the discretion and comfort of the interviewee. If discussing

instances of bullying, teasing, gossip, isolation in the workplace may cause stress, please notify

the researcher immediately. The health of all participants is paramount to this study and at any

time if you feel like you would like to end the interview please notify the researcher and the

interview will end.

BENEFITS

There are no benefits offered to participants.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All records obtained throughout this study will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless participants specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports, which could link participants to the study.

_____ Participant's initials (place on the bottom front page of two-sided consent forms)

EMERGENCY MEDICAL TREATMENT

The University of Tennessee does not "automatically" reimburse subjects for medical claims or other compensation. If physical injury is suffered in the course of research, or for more information, please notify the investigator in charge (list PI name and phone number).

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the researcher, Katelyn Brownlee, at 615-975-8780. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If

you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and

without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study

before data collection is completed you data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in

this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

VITA

Katelyn Elizabeth Brownlee was born in North Gower, Ontario, Canada, to Carolyn and Vern Brownlee. She is the older of their two daughters. She attended Canterbury High School for the Arts in Ottawa, Ontario where she specialized in voice and drama. As a high school student, Katelyn competed with the Ottawa Rowing Club and won a national championship trophy at the 2005 Canadian Secondary School Rowing Association Regatta in the women's pair. After graduation she attended the University of Tennessee, Knoxville on an athletic scholarship for women's rowing. During her time as an undergraduate student, Katelyn co-captained the 2008-2009 Lady Volunteer Rowing Team and was nominated for the Big Orange Award for her high character, enthusiasm, and commitment to her teammates. In 2009 she obtained a Bachelors of Arts degree from the University of Tennessee in Communication Studies. After working in non-profit communications for two years, Katelyn returned to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and accepted a graduate research assistantship in assessment and divisional effectiveness for the Division of Student Life. On campus Katelyn is a member of more than eleven committees and is also a member of the University of Tennessee's Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society chapter. During her graduate studies, Katelyn also accepted a position with the Oak Ridge Rowing Association to coach and manage the Atomic Youth Rowing Varsity Men's Program. Katelyn will graduate with a Masters of Science degree in Communication and Information in May 2013.